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NO. 1

A

RELIGIOUS THOUGHTS.

BY

MARY ANN KELTY,

AUTHOR OF THE "FAVORITE OF NATURE," &c.

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR J. HATCHARD AND SON,

PICCADILLY.

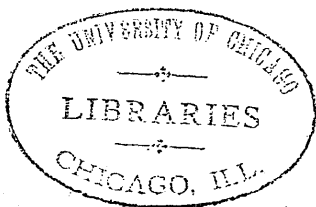
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LONDON:

PRINTED BY R. GILBERT,
ST. JOHN'S SQUARE.



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PREFACE.



IN presenting this little volume to public notice, I have decided, by the advice of those I respect, to withdraw from the shelter of anonymous publication; and this I do, not from any expectations that a name so unimportant as that which is affixed to this work, can be, in any degree, influential towards its success; but because it best accords with the opinions expressed in it, thus publicly to attest them to be my real opinions.

To those who have honoured my former works with approbation, and with a patronage which makes me fearfully responsible for the power they have themselves com-

mitted to me, I fear I can no longer hope to be acceptable.

The different view I have taken of things since first I had the gratification (and a very high gratification it was) to please them, compels me to abandon that line of composition which first engaged their favourable notice.

I once, indeed, had hopes that the great subject of religion might have been successfully interwoven into those works of imagination which it was very pleasing to me to write ; but I perceive that it cannot be.

I have spoken more fully upon this point, in the first chapter of this work ; and I trust that what is there advanced will be satisfactory to the many esteemed friends, who are of opinion, that I might usefully address the mind in a more amusing manner than that which I now adopt.

It is possible that I might have contrived to have many more readers, and perhaps, admirers ; and had fame and profit been the ends I proposed to myself, I should certainly not have pursued them by my present means. But I pretend not to undervalue either fame or profit ; for both, in proper subordination, may be very allowable incitements to action.

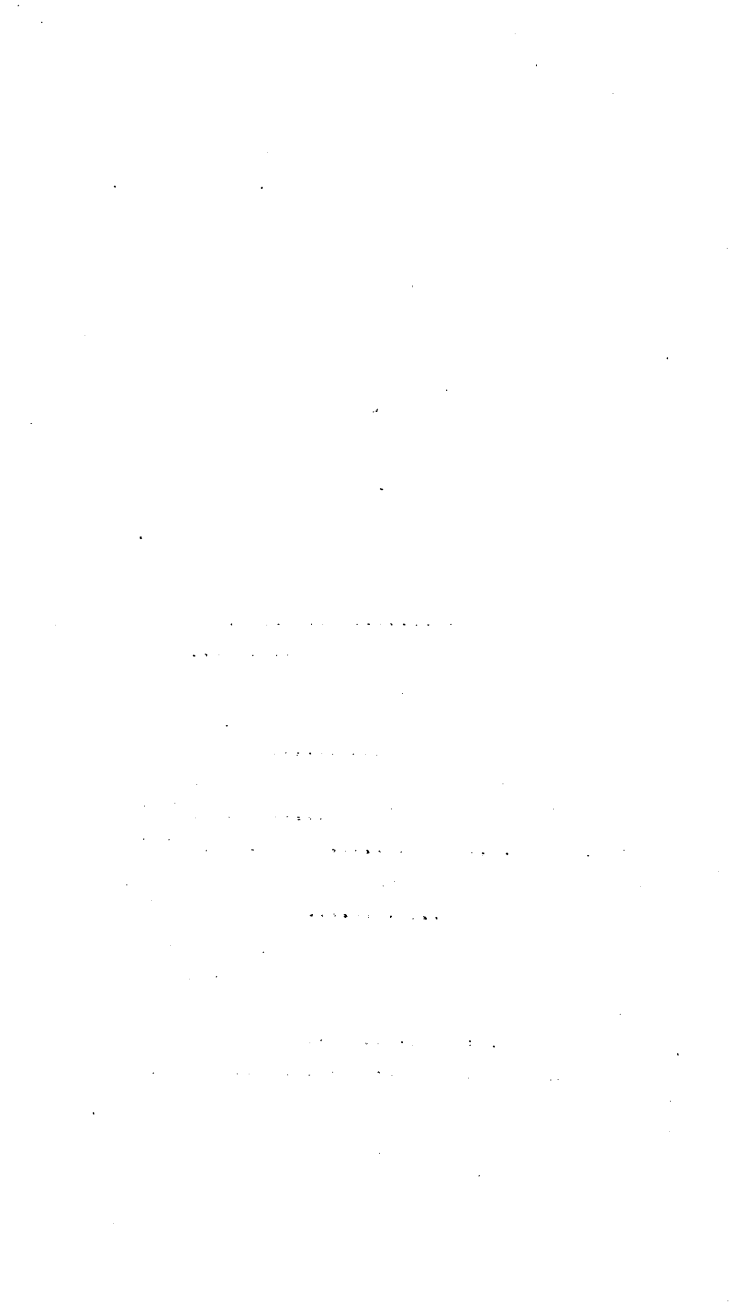
But objects are small or great according to the point of view in which they are seen ; and those who gaze upon worldly advantages through the medium of scriptural truth, are alone certain of estimating them at their real value. Thus beheld, they appear, not only as they now are, but, which is infinitely more important, just as they will continue to be, in the final result of all things.

Then, to muse upon the remembrance of popular applause, will be indeed to “*feed on ashes* ;” but *then* to be enriched with the

recollection of having been useful to one immortal soul in touching and awakening it to the consideration of its eternal interests, will be to partake of a pleasure, which may be numbered with those that are "at the right hand" of Omnipotence, and which are "incorruptible, undefiled, and that fade not away!"

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CHAPTER I.

ON THE INFLUENCE OF RELIGIOUS FICTITIOUS WRITING UPON THE MIND.

“Let all things be done unto edifying.” 1 Cor. xiv. 26.

IN considering this subject, it seems desirable to regard it in its influence both upon the writer and upon the reader. Its advantages to each are by no means despicable—to the former it offers a medium of presenting important views in a very fascinating manner to the mind, and of embodying the severest truths in the most attractive form. In approaching the judgment through the imagination, instruction steals its way insensibly, and thus makes many captives who would have stubbornly resisted any visible and vehement attack. Our Divine Lord, who well knew what was in the hearts of

men, has sufficiently indicated, by his method of teaching in parables, the importance of enlisting the imagination in the service of Religion,—nor can it be doubted that a faculty so restless and powerful must either be conciliated as the friend, or encountered as the foe of the understanding. That some occupation should be provided for it, appears indispensable, since it cannot be neutral in its operations. It may therefore be conceded to the writer of useful and pleasing fiction, that he lends his assistance to the cause of virtue.

The advantages of his labours to the reader we have already glanced at, in stating the unobtrusive and agreeable method by which they suggest to his mind such views and opinions as it is highly desirable he should possess; and of which, he, perhaps, would never have sought the possession, unless when presented to him in some such form as this. On his part, therefore, he is indebted to the author by whose means such valuable thoughts and impressions have been introduced to his notice, as if pursued, are well fitted to lead him to the further consideration of those great sub-

jects, for which works of this nature can, at the best, be only a preparation.

Such appear to be the principal advantages of religious fictions, considered as they mutually affect both the writer and the reader of them. In contemplating their disadvantages, it is to be feared we shall find they greatly overbalance all we have been able to advance in their favour.

And first, as they respect the writer:—In order to be successful in this species of literature, it is indispensable that the author be, in the most extended sense, a person of feeling. In most other departments of writing, this would be rather an impediment than an advantage,—in this it constitutes a chief part of the requisite qualifications.

Nothing cold, or subdued, or restrained, can be tolerated in the writer, whose chief business is to make his reader feel. It is not sufficient that he produces striking situations, and promising events — we require that he should dwell upon them. “You must work up your materials,” we say, “to the very utmost.” You must think, speak, and act as the characters

you represent would think, speak, and act. Nothing less than excellence can be accepted on this point; there is no mediocrity permitted in addresses to the passions, and if you fail here, you had better apply your talents to any pursuit than to the composition of works, which ground their chief hopes of acceptance upon their capacity of engaging and interesting the affections.

But supposing that your gifts are such as to render you eminently skilful in your appeal to the feelings, and that it is as natural for you to be eloquent and impassioned, as it is for many others to be dry and uninteresting; your success with your reader is in this case, perhaps, certain, but it will be bought in a greater or less degree at the price of your own mental health.

It is assumed that you are a person deeply impressed with religious truth—you would be otherwise unqualified to exhibit it to others. Have you, then, to learn the imminent hazard which waits upon indulged emotion? Is your progress in that knowledge, which the pure teaching of God's holy Word and Spirit gives,

so slight, that you suspect not some of the most dangerous of your foes in the beautiful disguise that impassioned feelings are so prone to wear? "He that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things"—temperate in his earthly hopes, and in his earthly sorrows. But you that write to the passions, can never be temperate. They dwell in an atmosphere whose horizon is bounded by tempestuous clouds—their exercise is in a storm—and he that approaches them, comes to the brink of a volcano, round which he may steal as cautiously as he will, but there is neither safety nor repose within its precincts.

Such are some of the latent, but not the least formidable evils of your undertaking. Those of a more apparent and palpable kind you may, perhaps, from inability, as well as inclination, escape. It may be that, to your other qualifications, you do not add a very fine and rapid perception of such minute peculiarities as shade and distinguish the character of different individuals. But if you should possess this faculty of discernment and delicate discrimination, the dangers of your em-

ployment will be greatly multiplied. It would neither be advisable nor probable, that you should permit this faculty to lie dormant; but very little consideration will suffice to shew you the hazard of exercising it, without violating that tenderness towards your fellow-creatures, which, being a follower of Him who was all tenderness, you would doubtless respect it as your duty to evince. It is extremely difficult for an acute observer of human nature to preserve himself from becoming more or less of a satirist; and in your delineations of character you will find it vain to attempt to "lay the flattering unction to your soul," that you have selected no particular individual for your subject. Probably you have not been so pointed as to deserve reprehension for having caused the blush of consciousness upon any face. But before you can generalize your observations, you must cull them from particular characters,—and to wander amongst the disordered wastes of the heart to gather materials for thinking, is commonly to familiarize ourselves with much which Christian charity would wish to overlook, and Christian tender-

ness to hide. The province of the skilful analyst of human nature, is much like that of the expert anatomist ; the work of both is eminently useful ; but as a kind and compassionate man would prefer any occupation to that which exposes him to endless disgust, or callous insensibility, so would the votary of Religion shun, rather than seek, an intimate acquaintance with any heart except his own. For the important and requisite purpose of self-examination, and as a means of exciting him to humility, he has within his own bosom a subject always at hand ; and with that single specimen his business lies. There he cannot be too scrutinizing, or too severe ; and there he will meet with ample materials for study, for caution, for guidance, and for improvement ; but with his erring fellow-mortals he has rather to overlook than to search ; and instead of pausing to dwell upon their errors, he is glad to pass by them as carelessly and as hastily as he can. The sincere, but keen and penetrating Christian, finds no effort more difficult than this. There is a triumph always attending the discovery of truth ; and truths of the kind we are considering address a most pe-

culiar sort of flattery to the fine and subtle discernment which has detected them. In the fields of science and the arts, the reward of discovery is a calm and dignified sentiment of self-approbation, the just meed of patient diligence and research, with which the mind rests duly and properly satisfied, even if every other species of approval were withheld. But it is not so with the student of human nature. In proportion as the result of his remarks is just and delicate, it is likely to be removed from the proper appreciation of the multitude; and exactly in the degree in which he conceives it is not rightly understood or estimated, he gives way to dissatisfaction and disgust. Nor has he, like the scientific student, any appeal from this uneasy state of feeling to matters of fact. He may analyse with perfect precision the most apparently dark and obscure portions of character; but his merit has every chance of being overlooked, from the very delicacy and skill that attends it.

It would require a greater share of benevolence than is usually found to accompany such qualifications, to preserve the mind thus dis-

appointed in its expectations of success, from becoming morose and misanthropic; and not to incur so dangerous a hazard, a Christian writer would devote his talents to almost any other pursuit, than that which must build some of its claims to merit upon the faithful delineation of human frailties. But there is still another view of the subject, on which an author of this class would do well to pause with deep deliberation.

No species of writing is so popular as fictitious writing. Other works are usually addressed to a particular circle; but this is acceptable to all ranks and conditions. Its exhibitions being addressed chiefly to the feelings, the result of its appearance is usually rapid and extreme. It is generally distinguished by complete success, or absolute failure. The anticipation of consequences so prompt and decisive, *must* create a feverish excitement, but ill according with that calm serenity of mind, which religion enjoins, and which is, in fact, the testimony of its presence in the soul.

A popular writer in this department of literature, is also, in general, a particular favorite

with the public ; there is a connection between him and his reader which resembles a tie of affinity. He is a sort of friend of the family, and by his successful address to the affections, weaves for himself fresh links in the chain which, perhaps, already too firmly binds him the prisoner of earth. How difficult it is to turn from the approbation which such pleasing testimony manifests, many persons must have experienced ; and so subtle are the workings of the heart, that, to maintain and secure the popularity thus bestowed, may often be the undetected but principal inducement to continue a pursuit, which other, and far nobler motives, are believed to prompt and sanctify.

We have now touched upon some of the most serious disadvantages which attend the case ; there is yet another of an inferior kind, which, as appealing more to the pride than the principle of a writer, we would only briefly notice.

This is the certainty of being considered, and criticised, and classed with the *mere* novelist. Whatever be the themes that exercise the pen of the fictitious writer, they are sure of being brought down to this level ; because every

reader of every description considers himself a competent judge of the merits of a novel. This, of itself presents a very important objection to the introduction of so sublime a subject as Religion, in such a form as invites the notice of many who look at it only to condemn. We have a command from the highest authority, to be cautious how we dispose of that which is holy* ; and it is a monition which it is well to remember, and, acting upon it, to avoid bringing the most sacred and important of subjects under the consideration of those, who, in the execution of their office as critics, conceive themselves bound to remark upon it, and, as the usual resort of ignorance, shield themselves invariably in censure, and thus endeavour to disparage that, of which their usual occupations and habits render it impossible they should know any thing beyond the name. *Religion* should be discussed *religiously*. In coming forth to the world in the disguise of fiction, it steals as a spy into the enemy's camp, and is

* "Give not that which is holy unto the dogs; neither cast ye your pearls before swine." Matt. vii. 6.

certain of meeting with punishment. In taking its own form, it solicits only the notice of friends, whose reproofs are just, and whose counsels are faithful.

To the reader of such works, the disadvantages principally consist in the disrelish they produce for others of a more abstruse and uninteresting kind, and in the imminent hazard which is thus induced, that truth will cease to please, unless when presented in a holiday suit, ready prepared for acceptance, and demanding no effort either of search or study. And here we do not dwell, as perhaps we might, upon the probable chance, in most cases, of the truths inculcated in fictitious works, being totally passed by, and the narrative, which was employed but as the vehicle for conveying those truths, proving the only object of the reader's attention. Besides this risk, it is reasonable to dread the rapid and imperceptible descent for which these writings pave the way. The gratified reader of them would prefer, no doubt, to obtain them always of the highest and most useful description; but these not presenting themselves, his restless imagination becomes less choice in its viands;

and from one step to another is not unlikely to be confirmed in the most pernicious of all habits—the reading merely for amusement. The whole experience of life tends to prove, that nothing valuable can be acquired without toil and difficulty. We do not slide into becoming eminent in any thing; much less into becoming eminent in goodness. The acquisition of truth is of all other acquisitions the most desirable; and whilst we admit that many lighter efforts of the pen have aided the advancement of morality and religion, we must still reserve for works of a professedly serious and meditative character, the merit of exciting that study, and those efforts of diligent and patient thought, which alone can be crowned with genuine and lasting results.

CHAPTER II.

ON NATURAL AND REVEALED RELIGION.



“Ye worship ye know not what; we know what we worship.” JOHN iv. 22.

To a contemplative mind, there is no subject so stupendous, or so sublime, as the study of the wonderful works of creation.

The calm and beautiful constancy with which they are carried on, the unerring certainty which accompanies their operations, and the unvarying steadiness with which they proceed by the simplest means to the most important end, bespeak a Power at work around us—a Power, from which, indeed, “no speech or language” comes; but yet such marks of deep intelligence,—such traces of visible design and contrivance,—such infallible tokens of unceasing

watchfulness, that in the very silence which accompanies this testimony, the thoughtful mind acknowledges that "a voice is heard."

But, vast as is the multitude of human beings whom God has endowed with senses to delight in, and faculties to meditate upon "His handy work," how few there are amongst us who pause to think, or whose giddy race through life is ever arrested by serious meditations upon the miracles amidst which we live, and move, and have our being. We are clothed—we are fed—the functions of existence proceed in their course, and but little solicitude prevails to inquire who it is that guards and maintains our interests so faithfully, and so well; it seems but of small import to the greater part of rational beings, *who* regulates the ceaseless motion of each throbbing pulse, and makes the vital breath they draw, so easy and so unperceived.

Yet there are, here and there, speculators, and observers, who turn upon the wonders of creation a more attentive, and a more inquiring survey; and who fail not, from such observation, to declare the certainty that there is a powerful, mysterious, silent, but ever-active,

ever-present Spirit, pervading and governing the universe.

But the perplexity which harasses the mind in pondering upon this inference, is extreme. The Psalmist appears to have strongly experienced it. "Such knowledge," he says, "is too wonderful for me; I cannot attain unto it." Unassisted reason, indeed, cannot attain unto it, although it catches with eagerness at every supposition; now delighted to mark in the happiness it contemplates, indications of the mercy and goodness of God, providing for the felicity of His meanest creatures; and now appalled with sights of misery, which cause the heart to shrink with terror, and to tremble with fearful conceptions of what may be the attributes of a Being, whose operations are so various, and so incomprehensible.

To day, perhaps, the man of speculation wanders forth, to muse upon the marvels that surround him; and nothing meets his senses, but such loveliness of sight, and sound, such a rich provision of enjoyment, that his heart becomes almost oppressed with the intensity of its own deep feelings, and he involuntarily pays

his tribute to the Author of so much bliss, in the language of praise and adoration. He perceives that it is not merely for the use and comfort of His creatures, that their bountiful Creator has provided ; but that the promotion of their pleasure formed a principal feature in His gracious designs. What a redundancy of beauty in the simplest wild flower !—What an exuberance of happiness in the young of every species !—What an overflow of existence ! It is not enough that they live—their consciousness of life is a source of the most exquisite joy.

“ Man *must* be born for happiness !” our speculator will exclaim. “ These emanations of Divine Intelligence and Goodness, which gleam upon me from every side, indicate that I too am formed for the enjoyment of complete felicity. The very rapture with which I behold these operations of the invisible but ever-present Deity, bespeak my destiny ; it is to worship and serve him here ; to exercise the reason He has given me in such acts of virtue as that reason approves of, and suggests, and then, as faithfully and securely as he has guarded my interests in this world, He will remove me nearer

to Himself, with enlarged capacities to understand, and to hold more intimate communion with Him. At present my part is easy to perform. I behold His agency in all I look upon. I see it without—I feel it within me—I feel that He is about my path, and about my bed, and that His hand upholds me wheresoever I go. It is delightful to confide in a Being, whose tender care of every thing He has created, testifies His benevolence and mercy!”

It is indeed delightful to rest upon the strength of Omnipotence, when confidence is built upon certainty; but grateful to the feelings as these upliftings of natural devotion may seem, are they durable?—can we reasonably expect them to experience no variation, when life is contemplated in another point of view, and when it presents to observation a very different aspect?—for the countenance it sometimes turns upon us, has features of a very dark and gloomy character. Let us ask the advocate for natural religion, to contemplate the fierce passions of disordered humanity roused to action—“Go,” would we say to him—“go round the dreadful field of battle.—Look upon

the dead and dying—hear the deep groans they utter—see the carnage that surrounds them—view the poor senseless brutes that served them, butchered by their side—gaze upon the trampled earth, and its good fruits laid waste—watch the hand of plunder on the corpse not yet quite cold—and tell us is this good, and is it right?”

Perhaps he will reply, that this is an extraordinary not an ordinary view of human circumstances. “War,” he will say, “is not continually spreading devastation round us—the usual condition of our towns and villages is flourishing and tranquil.”

“The surface may indeed appear untroubled,” we reply, “but we desire that you should penetrate beyond the surface. Few things are rightly estimated which are judged of only by appearance. Walk with us, then, to the abodes of sickness, poverty, and death. Consider in its variety of hideous aspect, the vast problem of existing evil. See the virtuous man oppressed with want and suffering—the wicked rioting in health and wealth. The infant of a day, the child perhaps of many

prayers, given but to be snatched away—or given diseased, deformed, and full of misery. The fond expectations of the young, or those nearly completed of the middle-aged—or those attained and rested on, as the only prop and safeguard of the old,—whatever be the cherished hope of life, you need not wander far, in order to behold it disappointed, and dashed to the ground.”

It is in vain to attempt the solution of these strange but stubborn facts, by any arguments which the light of unaided reason affords. It is equally vain to palliate them. The world, with all its loveliness, is full of sorrow, full of evil. There is no evading it—it meets us at every turn. There is no explaining it—it passes the line to which our finite faculties extend. But are we compelled to sit down amidst these perplexities, unsatisfied and unconvinced, and yielding to every successive probability to which contradictions are calculated to give birth? or shall we not rather seek such a clue to them as may induce us to acquiesce in, if we cannot reconcile the seeming contrarieties that surround us? There must

be such a clue—no mystery would be so inexplicable, as that the Author of our being should have placed us in circumstances so various and so strange, without imparting some light, to enable us in a measure to discern the purport of them.

Accordingly we find there is a record which contains the solution of the most important of our difficulties, and which affords to our ignorance the information, and to our helplessness the strength, it requires.

In this record we are addressed as sinners ; and it is only in contemplating ourselves as sinners that we can in any degree understand our destiny. The very first pages of the Inspired Writings contain an account of a transaction, in which, by the violation of certain conditions imposed upon him, man became rebellious to his Maker's will, and revolting from the obedience he owed to his natural and lawful Sovereign, made himself the servant of another master, whose work is sin, and whose recompence is death. From that sad moment he became adverse to all spiritual goodness. The voice of God was heard no more with tender

adoration ; that sacred intercourse, that divine communion, which formed a holy link between the creature and his Creator, subsisted no more. The perverted will, no longer capable of perceiving, or at liberty to choose its best and chiefest good, devoted itself to the pursuit of error, the most fatal of all errors, that of walking in the ways of a darkened and corrupted imagination, and following the devices of a deceived heart. He that was made at first but “ a little lower than the angels,” and who was “ formed to have dominion over the works of his Maker’s hands,” he, whom God “ had made upright,” and consequently happy ; he it was who, in falling from his innocence, “ sought out many inventions.” Fatal devices ! as weak as they were vain ; incapable of furnishing the ruined creature with any power to stem the torrent of evil, which his disobedience had caused to overflow the earth. “ By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin ; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.” In Adam our representative, we all sinned ; and by his transgression we all suffer. Such appears to be the Scripture ac-

count of that confusion in the world, which ever and anon perplexes and confounds the natural reasoner; and clearly may we perceive how the character of all terrestrial things illustrates its pure and simple statements. We see it not only in scenes of woe, but in the subjugation of every moral faculty of man. Can we fail to remark how luxuriantly evil grows and sprouts within him?—how easily, as by a natural bias, he falls into sin, and how it coalesces with his will. Then let us observe the slow and painful process by which virtuous principles are implanted in his mind, and the strong resistance they encounter. Look how the shackled will, encumbered with the chains of passion—look how tenaciously it clasps its fetters. See how it loves its prison-house of death. Look at the licentious votary of pleasure; look at the drunkard; look at the gambler; look at the poor decrepid miser; look at restless vanity fighting with old age and death, as though they were evils which opposition could subdue. Would you speak to them of better things; would you tell them of the countless thousands who have indulged, and

lived to lament the same infatuation to which they are now the slaves and victims ; would you bid them think upon a dying hour ; that hour which has urged millions to call aloud upon the God they never heretofore regarded, and caused them to ask for one day, one hour, one moment more for penitence and prayer—tell the vast multitude of living, thinking, acting human beings this, and will you gain a hearing ; or if you do, will what you say produce the end you wish ? Will they forget their idols and their vanities ? Will the subdued and contrite heart melt at your touch, and take the strong impression you desire ? Alas ! they want not your monitions ! They need not to be told that the end of the things to which they give themselves, is death. They feel them perish in the using. They see to what they conduct ; they behold the very grave which is to close upon them ; and cling to them the closer for the sight. The veil, the fatal veil which Adam's sin has wrapt around their hearts, withholds them from the sight of God and truth, and thus, after all the materials that reason or observation supply, towards the solution of that

vast problem which the existence of evil presents, the sum and substance of the whole matter appears to lie in our having virtually said unto God, "depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways; what is the Almighty that we should serve him? and what profit should we have if we pray unto him?" (Job xxi. 14, 15.) Can we then be surprised that "God distributeth sorrows in his anger?" or that, when the beasts of the field, "the ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib; but we know not, neither do we consider," we should often be called upon to behold "the fruitful place a wilderness, and all the cities thereof broken down at the presence of the Lord, and by his fierce anger." (Jer. iv. 26.)

But this view of the subject has still its difficulties, and those so great, that did we stop short at so painful a discovery, we must sink either into despair or infidelity. That all the disorder and consequent distress we witness, are tokens of the Divine displeasure, we can scarcely, as reasonable beings, doubt, were it not an inference which receives the confirmation

of Scripture. But to be left with only this sad and solitary gleam of illumination, disclosing nothing but the dim and uncertain horrors of our situation, would have been in direct contradiction to the innumerable indications of the benevolence and mercy of God, with which creation abounds. It is indeed quite obvious that we require something real, something that we can grasp in our conceptions of the Deity. We feel this to be necessary even in our general reasonings; but how much more indispensable is some clear and definite idea of his character, when, compelled by personal dispensations, we begin to meditate upon our own individual relation to Him. We then require some peculiarly strong and unshaken foundation on which to stand; and it might seem to unassisted reason that our firmest footing must be upon our deeds of virtue; but these, in the best of us, are too inferior in kind, and too small in degree, and too much alloyed by imperfection in motive and in execution to offer us any well grounded security in the awful prospect of meeting our Creator in the character of responsible beings, “to give an account of

the deeds done in the body." At other times, we may rove in the boundless fields of conjecture, and vaguely hope that all will be well with us at the last; but in the hour of suffering and of dissolution, we want some firm dependence. The mind is not then sufficiently disengaged to roam in search of chances. Terrible certainties are before it—pain, death, judgment. It has neither energy nor leisure for speculating upon probabilities. It has no calmness for drawing inferences. It wants some distinct and definite conception of the awful Being it is about to meet; it pines for some mediator, saying with the afflicted patriarch, "he is not a man, as I am, that I should answer him, and we should come together in judgment. Neither is there any daysman betwixt us, that might lay his hand upon us both." Then is the time when the most exalted musings of the natural reasoner fail to please or to instruct; but then is the time when those of the Christian are as edifying as they are consolatory. The exigencies of life may, for the present, disturb his enjoyments, or darken his prospects, but they have no power to bereave him of his expectations,

or shake his confidence in the ultimate result of events. Like the philosopher, he also pronounces "man is born for happiness!" but not, like him, does he draw this blessed inference from the beautiful, but varying radiations of uncertain feelings, which fall and rise with the perpetual fluctuation of external things. He has not to speculate upon his destiny; he has not to gather his deductions from what is merely probable. He loves and admires the wonders of the universe, but he does not seek from them his chief materials for hope or fear, or praise, or adoration. "I know what I have worshipped," he exclaims, even from the abyss of suffering. "I know that in the darkest night of my distress, as well as in the sunshine of my happiness, my fate is guarded and determined by One who changeth not. I see indeed on every side a vast and complicated scheme. I see the career of vice, smooth, easy, and successful; scarcely disturbed by any cross, or vexed by any disappointment. I behold the honest efforts of virtue opposed in every point; its labour fruitless, its hopes blighted, its difficulties many, its deserts great, its reward per-

haps contempt and poverty. I see on every hand, the fierce and resistless strength of passion trampling on human peace, and turning the best and loveliest gifts of God into the baneful sources of extremest misery.

Looking no further than the book of nature, I see nothing but confusion, nothing but distress. But opening another book, the book of God, I behold it all explained. That awful sentence "cursed is the ground for thy sake!" presents the solution of these gloomy mysteries. But, I am not left to mourn over this just but heavy judgment, uncheered with any hope of its mitigation. One man indeed brought it upon his wretched offspring, and at the remembrance of the first Adam my heart would be filled with bitterness and regret, did not the recollection of the second Adam more than allay its sorrows, and cause it to exult with a joy which no man taketh from me,—Jesus Christ, the same, yesterday, to day, and for ever, is my remedy for every doubt, for every difficulty. "He is the true light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world *." Illuminated

* John i. 9.

by the knowledge of him, "who of God is made unto me, wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption *," I wander not amidst clouds and darkness. Never thrown back upon itself, is reason perplexed by the difficulties she encounters in her search after truth ; for she "has found Him of whom Moses and the prophets did write."

He it is "who makes straight paths for my feet, and ordereth my goings in the way." He leads me through the labyrinth of this confused and troubled scene in safety and in peace. When exercised with sorrow and distressed with doubts, he tells me this is not my dwelling place. I must look for tribulation in it, indeed, but still he bids me be of good cheer ; for he has overcome the world. He proclaims himself "the way, the truth, and the life," through whom alone we have access to the Father of the universe. No cause then have I to lose myself in endless speculations, when a voice from heaven has spoken and told me whom I am to hear ! and like the favoured disciple who

* 1 Cor. i. 30.

heard that sacred voice, I exclaim, "Lord it is good for me to be here!"

It is good, indeed, for us to plant our faith in that adorable Being, who manifests himself by his works to the senses even of those to whom "the preaching of his cross is foolishness;" but who has promised in a more especial manner to make himself known to every one of his sincere disciples. "He that hath my commandments and keepeth them," he says, "he it is that loveth me; and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself unto him*." And not only has he given to his followers this assurance, but he has promised them the comfort of his constant presence. "Lo! I am with you even to the end of the world!" are words that dissipate all difficulties, and render the believer in Christ, and him only, a satisfied spectator of the world he inhabits.

Whilst others perplex themselves with vague uncertainties, and rest upon mere probabilities, he knows in whom he has believed. He feels

* John xiv. 21.

the ground he stands upon. What though the storms of affliction rage around him, and evil as a flood should threaten to overwhelm him, his house of defence is set on high ; it is built upon a rock, which all the combined malice of the powers of darkness cannot shake.

Secure in the hour of danger, how exquisite is his participation in the common blessings of existence. The sun which shines upon the evil and the good, shines for him with more peculiar beauty. The lovely face of nature wears for him her most attractive smile, and speaks her most instructive lesson ; for he alone it is, who, looking at her wondrous works, can, in the expressive language of the Christian poet,

“ Lift to heav’n an unpretentious eye,
And smiling say, my Father made them all !”

The world at large partake of these delights by starts of impulse, varying with every outward or internal change. But the Christian has one simple, single view. In storm or sunshine ; amidst scenes of vernal beauty or the desolating blasts of winter ; when cheerful health gives

vigour to his frame, or pale disease has stretched him on the couch of pain; when friends are kind and many, or when they change to foes; when angry passions sleep and soft affections reign around him; or, when unruly tempers and harsh feelings rise to wound his peace—he sees by the eye of faith, at his right hand, his ever-present—ever-powerful Friend. “Therefore will he not fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea *;” “for the Lord of hosts is with him, the God of Jacob is his refuge †.”

To him he looks in every change of this unstable and most changeful state, knowing that when his earthly house of this tabernacle is dissolved, he has a building of God, “a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens †.” To that blessed asylum he continually verges. Whilst the children of vanity are heaping up riches, and cannot tell who shall gather them; whilst every passing day and hour removes them *from* the objects on which their affections

* Ps. xlv. 2, 3. † Ps. xlv. 6. † 1 Cor. v. 1.

centre, he is advancing *to his* treasure. Decline and death, which these deluded beings shrink and shudder at, are hailed by him with gratitude and joy, as signals of his approaching summons to his holy and heavenly habitation.

Thus walking by faith and not by sight, he views this present world, not as a disordered stage of action where good and evil reign promiscuously; but, as the chequered scene, in which he is appointed to sustain a part, the right performance of which is revealed to him in the word of God.

In that sacred volume are also treasured the promises of support on which he rests; devoid of which, like an affrighted deer bewildered and alarmed, in vain would he seek a covert from the storms of life.

But on these he reposes. Possessed of these, he rejoices with the patriarch in the all-seeing providence of God. He asks with him, "Whither shall I go from thy spirit, or whither shall I flee from thy presence?" Like him also, in rapturous devotion he exclaims, "How precious are thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them! If I should count them,

they are more in number than the sand. When I awake I am still with Thee * !” And oh ! how fervently does he make the Psalmist’s prayer his own.—“ Search me, O God, and know my heart ; try me, and know my thoughts. And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting † !”

* Ps. cxxxix. 17, 18.

† Ps. cxxxix. 23, 24.

CHAPTER III.

ON THE DUTY OF STUDYING THE SACRED SCRIPTURES.

“ Search the Scriptures.” JOHN v. 39.

NOTHING, when we consider it deliberately and earnestly, appears so strange as the general aversion which is felt to the study of the Scriptures. If we only view them as containing the singular history of the most singular race of people that ever existed, this indifference to their contents is marvellously strange. Curiosity is a common passion enough, and rapidly and powerfully excited upon most subjects. But on this it lies dormant—it seems here to find no scope for its exercise—no stimulus for its exertion. Let us, however,

briefly review some of the peculiar and (one would think) very interesting features of the case, and see if they do not present attractions to invite observation, and stimulate inquiry.

There exists to this day the remains of a very extraordinary race of persons, like to no other upon the face of the earth, and this dissimilarity marked in so obvious and distinct a manner, that, dispersed as they are, through every quarter of the globe, they still bear such visible and striking tokens of identity, as to be easily distinguished from all other human beings.

The ordinances of their religion which they profess to have originally received from the immediate hand of God, are also strikingly peculiar; and the record which contains the history of them is confessedly, and upon internal evidence testifies itself to be, the most ancient book in the world; and consequently as such likely to contain some account of the kind and degree of revelation of himself, which the Deity might vouchsafe to impart to his rational creation.

This record the Jewish nation have always

received with the most undoubting faith, as containing the only authentic history of their Lawgiver and his institutions, from the era they commenced, until this day.

But as I cannot but feel my incompetence to do any adequate justice to the vast interest which, even in a human point of view, appears to me to belong to this part of the subject, I will here borrow the words of Dr. Graves, in his Lectures on the four last books of the Pentateuch:—"The Jewish legislator states it to be a chief design of that system of religious and civil institution which he delivered to his nation by the appointment of God, to guard them against the infection of idolatry and its attendant crimes, and to separate unto himself a holy people, who by a steady adherence to the code of laws he had prescribed, should preserve amongst them a system of rational faith and pure morality.

"When the Lord thy God shall cut off the nations before thee, take heed to thyself, that thou inquire not after their gods, saying, How did these nations serve their gods? even so will I do likewise. Thou shalt not do so unto the Lord thy God; for every abomination of the

Lord, which he hateth, have they done unto their gods ; for even their sons and their daughters have they burned in the fire to their gods. Whatsoever thing I shall command you, observe to do it ; thou shalt not add thereto, or diminish from it *.’

“ How clear and how impressive,” remarks Dr. Graves, “ are the concluding words of the last exhortation of their illustrious Lawgiver, to the assembled nation. See,” says he, “ ‘ I have set before thee this day life and good, death and evil ; in that I command thee this day to love the Lord thy God, and to walk in his ways, and to keep his commandments, and his statutes, and his judgments, that thou mayest live and multiply, and the Lord thy God shall bless thee, in the land whither thou goest to possess it ; but if thine heart turn away, and worship other gods and serve them, I denounce unto you this day, that ye shall surely perish, and that ye shall not prolong your days upon the land, whither thou passest over Jordan to possess it. I call heaven and earth to witness

* Deut. xii. 10, &c.

against you this day, that I have set before thee life and death, blessing and cursing ; therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live ; that thou mayest love the Lord thy God, and that thou mayest obey his voice, and that thou mayest cleave unto him (for he is thy life, and the length of thy days ;) that thou mayest dwell in the land, which the Lord sware unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them *.

“ Such was the theology of the Jewish religion,” proceeds Dr. Graves, “ at a period when the whole world was deeply infected with idolatry, when all knowledge of the one true God, all reverence for his sacred name, all reliance on his Providence, all obedience to his laws, were nearly banished from the earth ; when the severest chastisements had been tried in vain ; when no hopes of reformation appeared, from the refinements of civilization, or the researches of philosophy ; for the most civilized and enlightened nations adopted with the greatest greediness, and disseminated with the greatest

* Deut. xxx. 15, &c.

activity, the absurdities, impieties, and pollutions of idolatry. Then was the Jewish law promulgated to a nation who, to mere human judgment, might have appeared incapable of inventing or receiving such a high degree of moral or intellectual improvement, for they had been long enslaved to the Egyptians, the authors and supporters of the grossest idolatry; they had been weighed down by the severest bondage, perpetually harassed by the most incessant manual labours; for ‘the Egyptians made their lives bitter with hard bondage, in mortar, and in brick, and in all manner of service in the field.’

“At this time, and in this nation, was the Mosaic law promulgated, teaching the great principles of true religion, the self-existence, the unity, the perfections, and the providence of the one great Jehovah, reprobating all false gods, all image-worship, all the absurdities and profanations of idolatry. At this time, and in this nation, was a system of government framed, which had for its basis the reception of, and steady adherence to, this system of true religion, and establishing many regulations, which

would be in the highest degree irrational, and could never hope to be received, except from a general and thorough reliance on the superintendence of Divine Providence, controlling the course of nature, and directing every event; so as to proportion the prosperity of the Hebrew people, according to their obedience to that law which they received as divine.

“ In the mode in which the doctrines of their religion were promulgated, we find a minute attention to the moral and intellectual character of the nation for whom it was designed, and the most admirable precautions used, to impress attention and command obedience, if the authority of the Lawgiver was in reality divine; but precautions of such a nature, as would render his whole scheme abortive, and expose it to derision and contempt, if he had contrived it only by human artifice, and relied on nothing but human aid.

“ It is also well worthy of remark, how minutely and tenderly the Jewish religion provides for the various wants of the very lowest classes of society, the slave, the poor, the fatherless, and the widow. ‘ And if a stranger

sojourn with thee in your land, ye shall not vex him *.' ”

“ Beware that there be not a thought in thy wicked heart, saying, the seventh year, the year of release, is at hand ; and thine eye be evil against thy poor brother, and thou givest him nought. Thou shalt surely give him, and thine heart shall not be grieved when thou givest unto him, because that for this thing the Lord thy God shall bless thee in all thy works, and in all that thou puttest thine hand unto †.”

With equal solicitude does the law impress reverence for the authority and attention due to the wants of the aged, delivering as the direct command of Jehovah, “ Thou shalt rise up before the hoary head, and honour the face of the old man, and fear thy God ; I am the Lord.”

With a similar spirit does the same Lawgiver inculcate the duty of shewing tenderness to those who labour under any bodily infirmity. “ Thou shalt not curse the deaf, nor put a stumbling-block before the blind, but shall fear

* Lev. xix. 33.

† Deut. xv. 9, 10.

thy God—I am the Lord”—and with a still more exalted sense of the importance of virtue above every external advantage, and the proportionable obligation of promoting it in all with whom we have any intercourse, the inspired Lawgiver considers the neglecting to do so as a proof of criminal malignity. “Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart; thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him; thou shalt not revenge nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself—I am the Lord.”

“How admirably,” says Dr. Graves, “are such sentiments as these suited to the sacred original from whence they are supposed to flow! How strongly do they attest the Divine benevolence, which dictated the Jewish law, and the divine authority which alone could enforce such precepts by adequate sanctions, and impress such sentiments upon the human heart with practical conviction! If the intermixture of such sentiments and precepts with the civil code, and the union of political regulations with moral instruction and religious observ-

ances, is unparalleled in any other country, and by any other Lawgiver, does not this circumstance afford some presumptive evidence of the divine original of the Mosaic code? Surely every candid mind must at once reply in the affirmative to this reasonable question of Dr. Graves. And when we add to the statements above given, the great body of internal evidence which is contained in the same record of the succeeding dispensations of Providence towards this extraordinary people, all tending to illustrate and confirm their history—when we trace in their types and prophecies “the shadows of those good things to come,” which were completed and realized under the Gospel scheme; when we reflect upon the increasing light which, from the beginning to the end of the sacred Scriptures, distinguishes and stamps them with the peculiar seal of divinity, the noblest works of God commonly exhibiting this testimony, that they go from strength to strength; when we calmly meditate upon the mysterious manner (little indeed observed, but nevertheless most incontestably true,) in which the sublime principles of the Jewish law have been inter-

woven in our own views of truth ; many, perhaps all, those rules of morality we admire and respect so much, originating from this source ; how can we account for what we perceive, but in admitting it to proceed from God ? There is no solution to be given in any other way ; and, in fact, it is seldom that any is attempted by those persons who have candidly studied this extraordinary record. The loudest declaimers against revelation, have generally been found amongst those who have never examined the subject at all, or who have brought to the consideration of it, prejudices which no appeal could remove, or crimes which rendered it their interest to find it a fable.

The voice of God is indeed an awful voice, and perhaps no testimony, though it may be of a more obvious kind, is stronger in behalf of the truths of Scripture, than the general aversion which is felt to the study of it. Emanating from the Source of Truth, it so strongly testifies the holiness and purity which alone can be acceptable in the sight of a holy God, that the corrupt nature and misguided will of fallen man, revolts and turns away from the

contemplation of ideas so adverse to the current of his mind. If they were less rigid in their precepts, less uncompromising in their demands, in short, did they but bring the character of the Deity something nearer to the level of human depravity, can we doubt but that if it were only for the rich and inexhaustible stores of wisdom, of beautiful and sublime imagery, and of the curious remains of patriarchal life, with which the Scriptures abound, they would be equally the study of the philosopher, the poet, and the historian; appealed to as the most perfect transcript of "whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, and whatsoever things are of good report."

But perhaps the most important view of the subject arises from considering the Holy Scriptures as opposed to that spirit of proud independency which characterizes the natural heart. An artificial and inflated sentiment, which, under the name of the love of liberty, passes current for a noble elevation of mind, is the usual characteristic of those who are the least

free to pursue their best and truest interests. The person who would really know what true liberty is, must first seek emancipation from the slavery of an erring and stubborn will ; till that is accomplished, there may be the name, but none of the nature of liberty in the character.

“ He is the freeman whom the truth makes free,
And all are slaves beside.”

For how, we would ask, can it be consistent with freedom, that man should be so incapable of following his real interest, which reason, as well as revelation, testifies to consist in the love and pursuit of virtue ? How can it be consistent with liberty that he should devote himself to such objects as are known by experience to be detrimental to goodness, and consequently to happiness ; and that, till a vast and extraordinary change is wrought upon him, he should be incapable of enjoying any other than such pleasures, as, at the best, are continually passing away ; which, in the enjoyment, commonly disappoint his expectations, and, when obtained, are but one step upon that ladder, which, unlike that of the patriarch, leads any whither but

towards heaven. The mistake that produces such fatal effects upon our happiness, is the result of an ignorance which the study of the Scriptures would remove. They would prove to us that human nature did not come from the hands of the Divine Being such as we find it, with tastes so depraved, and a will so shackled.

In believing this to be the case, we can scarcely be surprised that such multitudes should sit down deceived, and contented to be so, deluding themselves with expectations, which, if their assumption were true, would be reasonable enough, that God would never be extreme to mark the errors and sins of a creature whom he had himself transmitted into the world with a corrupt and imperfect nature.

But it is impossible that wilful ignorance should stand us in any stead at the great and terrible day, when God shall judge the world by that Man whom he has appointed. A heathen, born and educated in a land on which the light of revelation never dawned, may hope, and perhaps be justified in hoping for acceptance with his Maker ; at all events, we could never be justified in making any other decision

upon his case ; because upon that point, it has pleased Infinite Wisdom to be silent. But that *we*, possessed of such a record of God's will and purposes towards us as the Bible contains, that *we* should trust to a plea of ignorance, is a contradiction to common sense. That *we* can believe and maintain such mistaken doctrines as would virtually tend to make Almighty God the author of the evil we find within us, is a degree of impiety and error for which we have no excuse, since we actually hold in our own keeping a book which tends to rectify such mistakes, by making us acquainted with the origin and cause of all our corruptions. No other book makes any pretension to this information, and without such information it is clear that we must be in perpetual hazard of irritating, rather than allaying, the great moral disorder which afflicts the world ; just as a physician who was kept in ignorance of his patient's disease, would be as likely to heighten as to reduce its symptoms by the remedies he prescribed. We work in the dark in every case, where we work not by the light of revelation. There can be no question, then, but

that the Bible is a book which it is our duty to read, and that not languidly, not superficially, but with an earnestness and zeal proportioned to the immense importance of the information it contains ; information in which we are all equally, all individually interested, and for the acquisition of which we are all fearfully responsible, so responsible that, but for the inveterate corruption which poisons the taste and incapacitates the will for any sedulous exertions about the real welfare of man, it would seem incredible that rational beings could be so supine, and so careless in searching into matters that so nearly and dearly concern them.

Many persons, indeed, there are, living within the reach of this information, who declare that they have studied it, but who withhold their assent to what it advances, on the ground of its containing what they are pleased to call "contradictory and unjust doctrines;" such, for instance, as the great mystery of original sin, and human redemption. It has been over and over again remarked, that most of the works, as well as the word of God, must appear confused and contradictory to those who refuse

assent to every thing which their finite faculties cannot comprehend. God has been pleased himself to tell us who those are whom he will condescend to teach. "The meek shall he guide in judgment, and teach sinners his way." If, therefore, the readers of his revealed will, come not to the study of it either as sinners or as meek and tractable, it is not surprising they should miss the object of their search, and remain uninfluenced and untaught.

Others again there are, and these constitute by far the greater part, who are for keeping to what they consider the plain practical part of scriptural morality; as if the doctrine and practice were not so interwoven with each other as to be inseparable; and as if a person could be a worse moralist for giving himself earnestly to the study of every branch of the religion he professes. Bishop Hopkins, in a very clear and most convincing discourse on the doctrine of the two covenants, has this passage: "That many of these things (the high doctrines of the Christian religion) are abstruse and difficult, I cannot deny; but that any of them are vain and frivolous, I do. It is a most ignorant and

weak excuse of many, who may perhaps be well-meaning people, that these things are too high speculations for them to search into ; that their eternal salvation may be secured well enough, though they know not such obscure points as these are, so long as they conscientiously practise those obvious truths and express duties which they know. I will not, I dare not deny, but men may be safe in not knowing what they cannot attain. But, if they pretend this as a shelter of slothful and affected ignorance, let them consider that many of the great and precious truths of the Gospel are delivered obscurely, not to excuse us from, but on purpose to engage us to, a diligent search and study of them. If these things were not expedient to be known, why should the Holy Scriptures so abound with them ? The epistles of St. Paul are full of these profound mysteries, which he wrote to the churches in common, and every member of them ; these were read in public assemblies, and it concerned all the people to hearken to them, and consider of them ; and if the pressing only of practical duties of Christianity had been sufficient, most

part of the Apostle's writings had been needless and superfluous. It is true we cannot determine what is the least degree either of grace or knowledge, that may just serve to bring a man to heaven ; but this we may say, that it is a very ill sign to drive the bargain so hard with God, to desire to be saved at the least charges and expences possible. This I will boldly say, that he who despiseth a more high and elevated knowledge of the mysteries of Christianity, where the means to attain it are afforded, though others who are destitute of those means may arrive at heaven and happiness, yet I must needs doubt whether ever he shall. To despise evangelical truths which do not so immediately tend to practice, is no other than to impute trivialness to the infinite wisdom of God who hath revealed them, and so often and largely insisted on them ; and to withdraw the chiefest part of ourselves, whereby we most of all show ourselves to be men, from his obedience, even our understandings. Certainly we serve God as well by endeavouring to know his truth, as by endeavouring to obey his commands ; and he who resolves to obey, God bidding *do* this,

but not when he bids him *understand* this, serves him more like an engine than like a man."

If it be observed, in reply to these remarks of the Bishop, that it would surely argue something of injustice in the dealings of the Divine Being with his creatures to enfold and wrap up the saving truths of religion in such a manner as to render them inaccessible to the greater part of mankind, whose want of talent or time for the study of them presents insuperable obstacles to their obtaining the knowledge which, nevertheless, it is essential to their salvation that they do obtain;—we may answer that the knowledge essential to salvation is within the reach of any person who is born in a Christian land; and nothing more forcibly exemplifies its divine character, than its perfect adaptation to every capacity, and every condition of human beings; the peasant and the philosopher, the king upon his throne and the beggar in his hut, may equally derive from it the consolation and direction which their respective cases may require; and this view of the subject, which all fair reasoners must allow

to be but a just one, it would be well for those who deny the divine original of the Scriptures, calmly and deeply to consider. It would be no unprofitable occupation to muse upon the practicability of a mere mortal's inventing a system of religion so comprehensive yet so simple, and so universally applicable to every possible case and circumstance of human life, as is the system which the Bible reveals to us. That the heart be humble, and the will subdued and teachable, are the chief requisites to the Christian scholar; bringing these qualities with him we may boldly say that no saving truths will be, or can be, withheld from his acquisition.

To believe that he possesses a corrupt and depraved nature wholly incapable in itself of loving or delighting in God, is no hard matter, involving any very abstruse truths inaccessible to the comprehension of any one deeply acquainted with the plague of his own heart. To seek a remedy for such a plague in the transformation and renewal of his nature, is as rational a procedure as can well be imagined; and to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ as made

unto him all that his sad circumstances require, “ wisdom and righteousness, and sanctification and redemption ;” and to evidence this faith by such deeds of virtue as betoken what Master he serves, and day by day to refresh himself for his spiritual life by feeding on the promises and studying the precepts of his Lord, and praying that he may be enabled to understand and follow them,—these are simple matters. Yet these are the great and important matters of religion ; therefore they are within the reach of all who desire to understand them.

“ I exhort and beseech you,” says Archbishop Leighton in one of his lectures, “ never to suffer so much as one day to pass, either through lazy negligence, or too much eagerness in inferior studies, without reading some part of the sacred records with a pious and attentive disposition of mind : still joining with your reading, fervent prayer, that you may thereby draw down that Divine light, without which spiritual things cannot be read and understood. But with this light shining upon them, it is not possible to express how much sweeter you will find these inspired writings than Cicero, Demosthenes,

Hömer, Aristotle, and all the other orators, poets, and philosophers. They reason about an imaginary felicity, and every one in his own way advances some precarious and uncertain thoughts upon it; but this Book alone shows clearly, and with absolute certainty, what it is, and points out the way that leads to the attainment of it. This is that which prevailed with St. Augustine to study the Scriptures, and engaged his affection to them. ‘In Cicero and Plato, and other such writers,’ says he, ‘I meet with many things wittily said, and things that have a moderate tendency to move the passions, but in none of them do I find these words, *Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*’ ”

That there are also in the inexhaustible mines of Holy Writ, deep and hidden treasures amply sufficient to repay the most laborious efforts and diligent search of those who are gifted with leisure and ability for the task, none that have prosecuted that task will attempt to deny. And this is analogous to all we know of the common course of things. What great advances does every succeeding age, nay, almost

every succeeding year, behold in the progress of the arts and sciences!—in medicine more particularly. How many invaluable specifics for various diseases were unknown to our ancestors! how many inventions also in the arts, so useful and necessary to the common comfort of life, that we can hardly conceive how it could go on without them. Yet who presumes to arraign the goodness of God, and complain that human happiness or human existence has been curtailed for the want of them? Neither do we dispute or doubt the efficacy of such and such medicines, or such and such inventions, on the ground that if they had been importantly useful, their merits would have been generally known. Yet many there are who would be ashamed of such puerile arguments in this case, who nevertheless bring them forward as an excuse for despising the truths of religion, rejecting them as unmeaning and unnecessary, because they conceive that if requisite they would have been universally known and received. Paley, in his *Evidences*, says, “I remember hearing an unbeliever say, that if God had given a revelation, he would have

written it in the skies." Upon which he proceeds to remark—"Are the truths of natural religion written in the skies, or in a language which every one reads? or is this the case with the most useful arts, or the most necessary sciences of human life? An Otaheitan or an Esquimaux knows nothing of Christianity; does he know more of the principles of deism or morality? which, notwithstanding his ignorance, are neither untrue nor unimportant, nor uncertain. The existence of the Deity is left to be collected from observations which every man does not make, which every man perhaps is not capable of making. Can it be argued that God does not exist, because if he did he would let us see him, or discover himself to mankind by proofs (such as we may think the nature of the subject merited,) which no inadvertency could miss, no prejudice withstand?"

But, leaving surmises and suppositions, one fact we may, nay, we *must* rest upon, in our views of religion, which is, the impossibility of sheltering ourselves by any excuse from the condemnation, which reason assures us will justly be the fate of those who, "caring for

none of these things," will not be even at the trouble of inquiring whether they be true or not. This "contempt prior to examination," as Paley so forcibly calls it, can scarcely fail to be a sin of the most awful magnitude in the sight of that merciful Being, who holds out to us such frequent and encouraging invitations to draw near to him, such rich and precious promises of more than meeting our advances towards him, and of bestowing upon us all the aids, either of knowledge or of strength, which our imperfect condition requires, simply upon the condition that we seek them by the means he has been pleased to place within our reach. Many may attempt to offer excuses for the want of faith, which they imagine to spring from the difficulties of the case, after having in some way or other considered it; but what can that bold opposer say to justify his infidelity, who is absolutely ignorant of the very subject he professes to disbelieve — who despises it without supplying himself with any information respecting its value, and condemns as incomprehensible what he has not even sought the means of understanding?

An infallible teacher has informed us that “the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field, the which when a man hath found he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field.”

“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchantman seeking goodly pearls, who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it.” This spiritual treasure, this pearl of great price, is not accessible to indolence and indifference, any more than temporal acquisitions are.

It has pleased the all-wise Governor of the Universe to make success the reward of labour. Throughout that part of the Divine economy with which we are acquainted, we invariably remark that *means* are employed to compass ends; and that more especially in the superior part of the Almighty’s noble works, the human mind, nothing truly valuable is of spontaneous growth. A man may be born rich, or great, or talented, but before he can be wise or learned, he must make many efforts, and submit to much discipline and difficulty. He must

search for knowledge as he would for hidden treasure.

As reasonably therefore might we expect to start by a wish into accomplished and informed persons, as into religious characters, without deeply and daily studying the only book that can help to make us so. But it is not study alone that can advance us far in heavenly wisdom — we must pray as well as read — we must pray as we read. Alas! where is the simple, single, humble mind that can submit to this! Naturally—nowhere! The new heart and the new spirit must precede the profitable study of the Word of God. The natural man receiveth it not—it is foolishness unto him. What need have we, then, preparatory to opening the sacred volume, to use the words of our admirable Liturgy:—Blessed Lord, who hast caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning, grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them; that by patience and comfort of thy holy Word, we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which thou hast given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ. *Amen.*

CHAPTER IV.

ON THE DISTASTE OF THE NATURAL HEART TO PURE AND SCRIPTURAL RELIGION.

“ But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God ; for they are foolishness unto him, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.” 1 Cor. ii. 14.

THAT the Christian religion is very distasteful to the natural heart is so obvious a fact, that it is scarcely requisite to seek the confirmation of it, by pointing out any of the various ways in which this general aversion manifests itself ; but were we to specify one of its most decided indications, we should urge the total want of charity, and, we might almost say of common sense, which the people of the world display in their judgment respecting religious professors.

That they have a right to expect from such persons a more consistent, self-denying, self-subdued course of life, is not to be denied ;

and that they should condemn with the utmost severity, all tendency to self-conceit, and the assumption of superiority, in those who profess to shape their conduct by the precepts of the meek and lowly Jesus, is but proper and reasonable. But to make no allowance for weakness and infirmities, and to expect that the aim and endeavour to act right should always be crowned with complete success, is, surely, to make demands upon human nature as absurd as they are severe.

Madame de Stael, (who cannot be suspected of too much rigidity in her own religious views, or of leaning to the side of those we are defending,) in speaking in her *Germany*, under the title of “Mysticism,” of pure evangelical religion, remarks, “without doubt, great faults may still appear in the character of those whose doctrine is the most pure; but is it to their doctrine we should refer them? We call them inconsistent if they commit any transgressions, or have any weaknesses; and yet nothing can entirely change the conditions of humanity*.”

* *Germany*, vol. 3. p. 332.

Finding therefore, as ever must be found, that mistakes and imperfections, and, perhaps, even worse than these, that even crimes are to be detected amongst those who profess to be religious, the world confounds together things the most opposite to each other, viz. the corruption of the human heart, and the truth and value of religious principle ; thus virtually making the revealed will of God a vague code of doctrine, which rises and falls in value, just as this or that person happens to be honest or dishonest in the sacred cause.

This is a mode of judging so unfair and so unsound, that upon any other subject but religion, its fallacy could scarcely fail of being detected and exposed. The man who attempted to maintain that all persons were false and unprincipled, because he had been defrauded or deceived, would soon be overpowered with opponents to whatever arguments he might bring forward in support of his opinion. But let him have been injured by a professor of religion, and he would never want champions to fight on his side.

No doubt but it is both reasonable and be-

coming to mark with the severest reproof, or the most sovereign contempt, the glaring inconsistency which is betrayed by any want of principle on the part of religious professors. But it behoves us upon such occasions to scrutinize well the motives of our indignation ; and can we believe that we shall not find at the bottom of our hearts, some disposition to depreciate the subject professed as well as the false professor of it ? Can we not detect there some disinclination towards the cause itself, as well as the culprit who has disgraced it ?

It is scarcely to be denied, that, opposed as it is in every part to the perfection of the Gospel, our fallen nature rushes with eagerness upon every instance which it conceives to have a tendency to depreciate the requirements of Christianity, and bring them something nearer to the standard of human degeneracy. It can hardly be doubted, but that to this desire may be traced the satisfaction with which any failure on the part of religious persons is too commonly hailed, as well as the severe scrutiny by which the motives of their most trifling actions are analyzed, and the rancour with which the frail-

ties they share in common with other human beings are pursued.

Nothing so completely manifests a want of acquaintance with the character of true religion as the sweeping and very general conclusion which many persons adopt, that its *genuine* disciples conceive themselves superior to their fellow mortals. On the contrary, no human being is so truly humble, so deeply impressed with a sense of unworthiness, as a sincerely pious Christian. He has a communion with his own sinful heart, and a warfare to maintain, which compel him to feel the strength and depravity of his will; and this communion, and this warfare, "which a stranger intermeddleth not with," combine to keep him in such a state of humiliation, and dependence upon God, as to preclude the possibility of his being puffed up with any ideas of his own superiority.

It is admitted that there are pretenders in religion, as well as in every thing else. There are pretenders to the name of poets, of painters, of musicians, of authors, whose performances are detected to be valueless. But no one will affirm that there is no such thing as beauty and

truth in the arts and sciences to which such pretensions are directed. We are told from scriptural authority, that Satan can transform himself into an angel of light; and is it to be expected that so powerful an engine against his dominion as Christianity, should remain unmolested by his assaults? That he should prevail upon some of his followers to assume its garb for the worst of purposes, is only a confirmation of what the word of truth has prepared us to expect; and which it informs us has been actually the case since the earliest ages of the world.

“He was a murderer from the beginning,” says our blessed Lord, “and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own, for he is a liar and the father of it*.” But the error we are considering, is rendered still more dangerous by its leading the mind to confound the pure word of God with the judgment of fallible creatures. No two extremes can be so opposite. Let us for instance briefly compare

* John viii. 44.

the opinions expressed in the one, and entertained by the other, upon the plain doctrine of original sin.

That there is a universal taint in the human heart, a radical corruption which comes under the term sin, is the great and fundamental truth which the Bible inculcates, as a first principle, from beginning to end. Its statements are unintelligible, and it is a sealed book to us, upon any other supposition. The world virtually denies this. That man is a frail and erring creature indeed, is allowed; but that he is gifted with many virtues, which it classes together, under the denomination of a good heart. Scripture acknowledges no such thing as a good heart; on the contrary it maintains that "the heart of man is only evil continually." "Out of the heart," says our Saviour, "proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies;" and it would be easy to multiply passages of this nature, and to oppose to them innumerable quotations from the writings of many authors, which testify the most unmeasured sentiments respecting the dignity of human nature. It

may suffice to appeal to the consciences of most persons, if they have not frequently detected in themselves, opinions the most entirely opposed to Scripture on this point.

To have too much *pride*, to be guilty of this or the other action, is a far more common method of deprecating it, than an humble ejaculation for sufficient grace to resist it. A *proper* pride is the term for indulging in tempers the most adverse to the humble and modest virtues which Christianity recommends. The very circumstance of this appeal as to a safeguard from sin, to a vice the most contrary to the tenor of Scripture, displays the repugnance of the heart to be guided by its meek and lowly doctrines.

But let us once more refer to the sacred standard of truth: let us turn to the sixth chapter of St. Luke's Gospel, and from the twentieth verse to the twenty-sixth, let us read our blessed Lord's opinion of happiness and woe, and then compare it with the sentiments of the world on these subjects.

“ And he lifted up his eyes on his disciples, and said, Blessed be ye poor; for your's is the

kingdom of God. Blessed are ye that hunger now : for ye shall be filled. Blessed are ye that weep now : for ye shall laugh.

“ Blessed are ye when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man’s sake.

“ Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy: for behold your reward is great in heaven : for in like manner did their fathers unto the prophets. But woe unto you that are rich ! for ye have received your consolation.

“ Woe unto you that are full ! for ye shall hunger. Woe unto you that laugh now ! for ye shall mourn and weep.

“ Woe unto you when all men shall speak well of you ! for so did their fathers to the false prophets.”

Is this, we would ask, “ in the spirit of the natural heart ? ” Does it behold any thing lovely or desirable in the poverty and privation which our Lord denominates blessed ? Does it detect any snare or subject for woe in the temptation of riches ? Can it even comprehend the possibility of deriving either happiness

or misery from the circumstances which the very voice of God has proclaimed to be productive of these effects? Is it not, in short, completely and absolutely at variance in sentiment and practice to every thing that is here advanced?

Again, "Behold the fear of the Lord *that* is wisdom, and to depart from evil is understanding."

But does the unrenewed heart appreciate this as true wisdom? So far from it, that the person who believes and acts upon this sentiment, and sets himself "to fear the Lord and depart from evil," is most certain to be stigmatized as a fanatic or an enthusiast; so impossible or so unnecessary does it seem to the natural man to serve God in the way he has himself been pleased to point out. And then, as to the crowning work of redemption; the Scriptures, after setting forth in the strongest light, our fallen, helpless state, do not leave us in despair, but with the disease they point out the remedy. There is but one way, we are told, in which our souls can be redeemed, and our natures renewed.

“In Christ are *hid* all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge *.” But are there many who readily approve of, and accept that way themselves, or sanction and commend the examples of those who do? Alas! we need not pursue these inquiries! It is most unquestionably true, as has been observed by Mr. Adam, that “with respect to a man’s *character*, he had better be guilty of almost any sin, than what the world calls too much religion.”

But, if we may believe the Bible, (and if we cannot, we have nothing to refer to,) we must perceive that religion is a matter between God and the soul: that it is a real and an important matter; important beyond any that a human being can be engaged in; that it dwells not in notions, in opinions, in parties, or in sects, but in “repentance towards God, and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.”

These are its plain and simple principles; but plain and simple as they are, it is difficult to adhere to them as the rule and guide of life, without giving and receiving offence. From

* Col. ii. 3.

the earliest days of Christianity we have heard of such an offence, "*the offence of the cross.*" If, indeed, "in this world only we have hope in Christ," we might justly say, "we were of all men most miserable." Nothing, in that case, would be so unreasonable as religious fervour; but if the Scriptures be true, we may confidently ask *who* are the unreasonable? *who* are the deluded? If eternal life be the object in view, is it not unreasonable to make no exertions to obtain it? If Jesus Christ be the only way to it, is it not delusion to seek no interest in him? If his Gospel be the only means of acquiring the knowledge of him, is it not unreasonable to omit the study of it? Is it any thing less than an aberration of the understanding not to give ourselves wholly to these things?

But we shall here be reminded that other things, the things of time and sense, are so real, so present, so engrossing, that there is no escaping them. It is allowed that they are all this, and that they must be attended to—but are they eternal? Do we live here always? Do even the oldest of us live here long? And if we do not, and if there is a state of being after

death, in which we must live for ever, is it not common wisdom to prepare for it?

A death-bed is the test—the only test of truth. Did any one ever, then, remark with bitterness upon religious enthusiasm? Was any one ever, then, heard to say that he had thought too much on these things, been too cautious, too much afraid of temptation, too wary, too guarded? On the contrary, in proportion to the conflict, has not the joy been great? “I have fought the good fight.” Fought—and fight. Do the words mean any thing or nothing? and if any thing, is it not every thing? Is it not the daily, hourly, momentary combat with nature which the man in earnest must engage in—the man who never slumbers on his post, but hails an enemy in every thought that would enslave him to the love of earth—that earth in which he feels himself a probationer and a pilgrim, and which he walks in as a stranger?

But is this labour without profit, this toil without reward? No; the sacred Book that teaches him to prepare for, and to expect it as his allotted work, promises him also a recom-

pence. But it is at the gates of death, through which all living souls must pass, that the Captain under whose banner he has fought, waits to reward his faithful soldier. Thither he advances with a smile—"I have fought the good fight," he exclaims, "a painful, a daily, an agonizing fight, but I have set God always before me, and he has enabled me to triumph. I have endured, as seeing him that is invisible—I know in whom I have trusted, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him. I depart with joy to claim the crown of righteousness, which is laid up for me, and which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day."

Is this the language of the worldly man at such an awful moment? Has he also a hope of heaven and of happiness? Has he fought this spiritual fight? has he known in whom he has believed? Has he set God always before him? does he depart in peace? and if he does, is it a true peace, founded upon God's promises—founded upon reason—founded upon common sense?

Alas! *can* we believe it? *Can* we believe

that religion, the most important, the most essential, and certainly the most difficult of subjects, to be practically understood, is the only one in which a human being can be informed without study, and skilful without exercise? Do we judge in any other case as we judge in this? If a person is to gain a prize in any kind of competition, he makes some preparation, and gives himself up in a greater or less degree to the consideration of what is expected from him. But in religion the mind is averted from its object, *it cannot*, because it *will not*, understand it. "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, they are foolishness unto him."

It is not then surprising that, in this state of spiritual ignorance, those who seek an understanding in divine things, should be considered as enthusiasts, or that any strictly scriptural views and professions should be depreciated and condemned as injurious to society. They *are* injurious, most unquestionably to worldly society. They come too home—they strike too deeply at the root of sin—which is a love of *pleasure* mistaken for *happiness*. With this

insatiable desire Christianity holds no parley—she demands an entire surrender, a complete sacrifice of *self*, that idol to which the heart pays such devout and unremitting homage. Once having set the hand to the plough, she admits of no turning back. And here we may discover one radical cause of the hostility which genuine religion so commonly excites. The mind has a dislike to difficulty, and hence its resistance to any principle which requires efforts. It is quite obvious that a knowledge of religion is not an easy acquisition. Nothing is easy that is truly desirable. It is not easy to be a good painter, or poet, or musician. It is not easy to acquire wealth by honest means; and can we imagine we are to obtain “glory and honour and immortality,” merely by wishing for it? “The wedding-garment” must be bought with toil, and tears, and trouble. “For we wrestle not,” says St. Paul, “against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.”

This conflict is far from a slight one; but

religion demands that we engage in it. She will not hear of a compromise. Yet unbending and steadfast as are her requirements, she makes the most compassionate allowance for the frailties of her faithful followers. One ever lives to intercede for his sincere disciples; but he demands that they *be* sincere—that they *be* believers in all that he *has* done, and all that he has yet to do for them. He enlists them under his banner to wage unceasing war with their own corruptions, and with the enemy of their souls; he commands them to “abhor that which is evil, and cleave to that which is good;” and when the force of temptation prevails against the infirmity of nature, he bids them mourn with bitterness their fall, a command which needs no repetition—for bitterly indeed they do bemoan it. No sophistry can ever prevail upon the true Christian to adopt the common but fatal error of believing that his sins *can* be made the subject of compassion to his Maker. He knows that in the sight of a pure and holy God, his iniquities must ever be hateful. No motion of pride or self-conceit introduces petulant inquiries why this is so. Hu-

militancy forbids it—faith forbids it. He takes the Word of God simply and singly—believes it because he has said it, and silences all doubts by the pious supplication, “What I know not, teach thou me!”

It is sufficient for him to know that “there is a fountain opened for sin,” into which he may plunge his polluted soul, not seven times, but seventy times seven—nor let the opposer of this doctrine say that it opens a door to licentiousness. With the faithless and the deceiver it may be so. It is to be expected that the arch apostate, who poisoned from the first the beauties of this fair creation, and debased the noble creature that was placed here to enjoy them, should infuse his venom into the doctrines of redemption, and try to turn that grand and glorious gift to the purposes most accordant to his fallen nature. But the true believer can never participate in sentiments so adverse, so abhorrent to that pure and holy Spirit for which he supplicates as for his life.

It is that Spirit which teaches him to loathe the indwelling corruption which, till he puts off

his earthly tabernacle, he daily feels, with anguish of heart, he cannot totally escape from.

It is that Spirit which makes him cry with groanings that cannot be uttered, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" And it is that Spirit which, when bitter and unjust accusations oppress and harass him, occasions the indignant but animated demand of the apostle to burst from his lips—"What! shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid *!"

* Rom. vi. 1, 2.

CHAPTER V.

ON RELIGION AS A PERSONAL CONCERN.

“Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed upon Thee.”—ISA. xxvi. 3.

It appears rather an injudicious, though a well intended plan, when inculcating moral lessons upon young minds, to underrate the attractions of worldly pleasures. Let us give them their due measure of importance; let us speak of them as they are, as potent in seducing and in captivating the senses. No representation to the contrary can have any chance of being believed by the young and ardent, who are unchastized by sorrow, uninfluenced by religious principle, and uninformed by experience.

The hour for successfully admonishing the mind, is not that which ushers it in the full glow of youth, panting for the chace after happiness; but that which follows, when, though

fatigued and exhausted with the vain pursuit, and continually mocked and disappointed with grasping at shadows, it is still rushing with eagerness to seize on every object that promises enjoyment.

The hour of disappointment is the hour for instruction. There is an energy and force in truth which *will* eventually prevail ; though it must be confessed that its triumph is very often delayed and impeded by the ill-timed and indiscreet efforts of its votaries to render it successful. Like unskilful practitioners in medicine, they neither watch nor wait for the crisis of the disease, but pour in their remedies without discernment, and consequently without advantage. But this is seldom the case if care is taken to mark with precision, and treat with tenderness, those yearnings after consolation which, from the profoundest depths of suffering, the human heart yet heaves.

It is the mere romance of imagination to speak of voluntarily indulged grief. No living being is voluntarily unhappy. No creature that exists can, by the very constitution of its nature, do otherwise than endeavour to the utmost of

its ability, to extricate itself from sensations of misery. There may be a natural insensibility of mind which is quiet under grief, as it would be quiet under joy ; and which makes no efforts to regain its lost happiness, because it makes no efforts about any thing ; but, to an ardent character, this quietude in misfortune is totally impossible ; it would be more insupportable than the misfortune itself. The forcible language of Scripture well compares the state of such a person to that of a wild animal entangled in a net. The strength of resistance increases with the sense of its uselessness ; whilst the rebellious will, like a ferocious beast, exhausted, though not subdued, pauses in its efforts only to renew them with augmented force. Well do those know, who have watched by the side of a sufferer of this character, what pity, what forbearance, what calm and resolute judgment are requisite to prevent the impulses of compassion from being overpowered by indignation, at beholding the degrading triumph which crowns the passions conquerors over reason.

The Christian only, in imitation of his divine

Master, beholds these wounded feelings, and puts forth the hand of pity to bind them up and heal them. If released himself from their torture, he looks with tenfold commiseration on those who are still galled by their irritating fetters. If still condemned to make a daily warfare against their power, he sympathizes with tenderness in a fate so similar to his own.

He lets the tempest of the passions work ; it is indeed an awful storm, he trembles to behold it ; but in the ravages it leaves behind, his most successful lesson lives. Then, as a thoughtful man, who meditates beside the ocean, on whose troubled breast the vestiges of last night's awful storm in many a mangled wreck are floating, he calls his children to behold the work of passion. He bids them view the sacrifice and count the cost, and reckon up their gains. What can they reckon ? Where is the beauty, where the talents, where the seducing charms they took with them to gild the morning of enchanting youth ? Where the distinction and the fame they sought as their sole earthly good ? Where are their pleasures ? There lies sobriety of character, there domestic peace, there do-

mestic duties, there the precious gifts of health, of talents and of time, there the solid virtues, truth and honesty, there the blessed fruits of virtue, peace, and joy—squandered, bartered, thrown away; for what? a phantom! the shadow of a shade! “Where are your brilliant conquests now?” our monitor inquires. “Where is the splendid ball-room filled with admiring crowds? Where is the theatre in which an audience moved as by a simultaneous impulse to gaze upon their favourite’s entrance? They still exist; the dear deceiving world and all its false delights are still the same; they are not altered; they beckon still for fresh disciples to their cause. But not for you, poor ruined creatures! Your race is ended; your career is run; some newer, younger, lovelier favourite claims their notice: no smiles of welcome can they give you now, still less can they afford you tears. ’Tis true that you are bankrupt in their service; but they gave you all they had to give, and wherefore do you mourn it was not more? They promised pleasure, not happiness; they promised mirth, not cheerfulness; they promised distinction, not contentment;

they promised for the present, not for the future. They know no future, neither do those who follow them. Then why this blank amazement as you view your desolated state? 'No strange thing has befallen you.' It is a consequence attendant on a cause; it is a result as infallible from given circumstances, as is the proof of any numerical calculation; it remains with you to make it a means to the noblest and the happiest end."

There are a race of beings in the world, yes, even in this false deceiving world, who still are happy. You thirst for happiness; it was that raging thirst slaking its ardour at polluted streams, which poisoned all your peace; then muse awhile and judge how it occurred that these humble unpretending people gained what you so totally have missed. The simple cause you will find to be this. They *desired* to believe in the word of revelation; they prayed to be enabled to believe in it; and their prayers were answered, for they did believe in it. They then discovered in its plain and simple statements, the whole secret of human destiny, and human happiness; they had a practical knowledge

that it was indeed what it proclaimed itself to be, "the secret of the Lord," which is only to be found "with those who fear him." They did not receive as words without meaning such declarations as these: "How oft is the candle of the wicked put out; and how oft cometh their destruction upon them? God distributeth sorrows in his anger." Job xxi. 17. They beheld it done in innumerable instances; they saw that his word was faithful and true, and that his works corroborated it. Did they not then tremble at offending this great and glorious God, who declares that "the wicked is reserved for the day of destruction? and that they shall be brought forth to the day of wrath?" Job xxi. 30. They surely did; thus exemplifying the first principles of a sound judgment, which restrained them from seeking their chief good in any thing but God; and prompted them to act upon the assurance that "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge." Upon this foundation they erected their felicity; walking by faith and not by sight, they used the world as not abusing it, knowing that the time was short. What then to them were its en-

snaring pleasures? were they trifles despised and disdained, renounced without effort, and passed over without comment? No, not so! They were beings of like passions with you; and think you they were inaccessible to the like temptations? Think you the ardent feelings of youth were not as vehement and impetuous in their case as in yours? Think you that the force and fire of an impetuous temper, the wanderings of a wild imagination, the strength and activity of a headstrong and rebellious will gave them no trouble, no resistance, no exertion? Alas! how blindly do you judge, if thus you judge! Born alike the fallen children of a fallen race, the same in guilty and disordered natures, the same in eagerness to seek their rest in vanity and sin, the same as yours had been their fate, if *faith*, the blessed gift of God, had not restored and saved them. Once having faith, they felt that they had every thing. They believed that what the Scriptures described to be their chiefest good was *really* so. They believed the ways of religion were ways of pleasantness, and that all her paths were peace. They believed those ways in their

first onset to be strait and narrow ; their Lord had told them so, and it sufficed. They believed they had a warfare to endure, for that was promised them ; they felt experimentally, that he that would be the disciple of the Saviour, must daily take up his cross. Then daily did they take it up, in the renunciation of self, the mortification of desire, the emancipation of the will. The work was hard, but they expected it to be so. They were not promised ease and gratification, and pleasure, and sensual delights ; on the contrary they were called to endure hardships, as good soldiers of Jesus Christ, to fight manfully under his banner, and to go forth without the camp bearing his reproach ; to be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord ; and why ? why was this labour, why this endurance, why this resistance unto death against the strongest and most clamorous solicitations of flesh and blood ; why this agonizing conflict, why this daily death of an unruly will, this “ never-ending, still beginning ” warfare ? Simply for this reason ; forasmuch as they *knew* that their labour was not in vain in the Lord. Yes they *knew* it. They

knew that every promise of reward “ was with him yea, and with him amen.”

And think not that even here, their lot is one of unsweetened toil! They have joys that the world knows nothing of. Their simple sincerity of faith is the key which unlocks for *them*, for their individual use, the treasury of “ rich and precious promises,” with which God has vouchsafed to bless his believing children. They dwell not in that broad and barren field of generalities, in which mere nominal Christians wander so bewildered, seeking in vain for spiritual food and consolation. It is no more a miracle to the real believer, that God should guide and govern and dispose, according to His sovereign will, of his spiritual, than of his bodily interests. He knows how small a part he himself takes in sustaining and nourishing the one, beyond the simple means of food and raiment. He knows not how the vital functions of existence perform their office, nor how they are enabled to perform them; yet life is supported without his dictate or direction; he knows that there is a mysterious cause acting constantly upon him, distinctly, separately, individually.

Thus it is in his corporeal, and thus he believes it to be in his spiritual frame. He conceives of it as a mystery, but not the less a fact. He observes that he is surrounded by mysteries. He cannot take a step without encountering a mystery—he cannot lift his hand to his head without a mystery. He could not use his judgment in one case in ten, if he withheld its exercise till he had solved a mystery. He perceives that in innumerable instances he is compelled to assent to what he cannot understand, and is satisfied to be convinced without argument, when the case is obviously beyond the reach of argument. He is aware, to use the emphatic words of Mr. Cecil, that “there is but one beaten, consecrated tract to glory, in which the scholar *knows* by believing, ascends by humiliation, and conquers by suffering.”

He then “knows by believing”—he knows that God’s ways are not as man’s ways; and that if therefore it has been according to the good pleasure of his will, to permit the creature of his power to be disciplined with trial, and exercised with painful labour, in the subjugation of an evil nature, it is but one amongst a

multitude of mysteries, to which he meekly bows, in humble acquiescence and submission. Enough is given to illuminate, to comfort, and to delight him. To illuminate, O how far beyond the richest page of human learning, the richest stores of human intellect. He acquaints himself with God, and is at peace. What other lore produces such a heavenly result as this? What other acquisition brings with it such a fund of mental wealth as this? The "wise ones of the earth" are fools, when brought in competition with the man who studies and believes his Bible. They see indeed the second causes work—they see what sense discloses—what the visual orb beholds; but they perceive not the mighty mover of these causes, "they regard not the Lord, neither do they consider the operation of his hands." But "they that seek the Lord understand all things*." Growing in grace, and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, the believer grows also in every intellectual gift. Again, to use the forcible language of Mr. Cecil, "True grace," he says,

* Prov. xxviii. 5.

“ is a growing principle. The Christian grows in discernment : a child may play with a serpent, but the man gets as far from it as he can : a child may taste poison, but the man will not suffer a speck of poison near him. He grows in *humility* ; the blade shoots up boldly, and the young ear keeps erect with confidence ; but the full corn in the ear inclines itself towards the earth, not because it is feebler, but because it is more matured. He grows in strength ; the new wine ferments and frets ; but the old wine acquires a body and firmness*.”

The man is wise, because adopting the counsel of St. Paul, “ he became a fool, in order that he might become wise.” He became humble, lowly, teachable, obedient, feeling that he knew nothing as he ought to know—he sought wisdom of God, and he, according to his gracious promise, has given it to him.

He identifies his own case with those which he is assured “ were written for his learning :” he reads not as a mere figure of speech the language of Isaiah, “ they that wait upon the

* Remains, p. 179.

Lord shall renew their strength ; they shall mount up with wings as eagles, they shall run and not be weary : and they shall walk and not faint *."

Nor does he peruse as a string of formal supplications the whole of the 119th Psalm ; the most energetic, sublime, and impassioned prayer for divine teaching, that the heart of man can breathe ; and such a prayer as no unrenewed heart could have breathed. He makes these petitions his own—he recognizes his own wants, his own weaknesses, in every aspiration of the Psalmist, and feels that there is a transaction carrying on between his soul and its Maker, as real, as single, and as personal, as if every other human being were swept away, and he alone left upon the face of the earth. Upon no other foundation could his faith for a single moment stand. Upon no other ground could he make head against any one of his corruptions ; upon no other view could he contemplate life without disgust, or death without dismay. But the very instant in which he can

truly say "God is *my* portion," "the Lord is *my* shepherd," he has done with doubt—he rests upon the bosom of Omnipotence, and "come what, come may," his treasure is secure, for it is above the storms of fate—it is in heaven. Would you then be blessed as he is blessed, believe as he has believed. Come to the study of your Bible with a praying heart—a trusting heart—a simple and a humble heart. Come to it as a sinner, or come not at all. It is no book for you if you go to the perusal of it in any other character: but if subdued and contrite, touched and melted into penitence, you wish to make its comforts and its counsels yours, come! freely come! it is a book addressed to you—as singly and as solely addressed to you, as if none other lived to benefit by reading it. Holy prophets and apostles of old were inspired for your instruction. The Saviour himself prayed individually for you the night before he suffered, if you have faith to receive him on the testimony of those who were appointed to spread his Gospel. "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on

me through their word *.” Now, even now, perhaps, his Holy Spirit strives within you, and urges you to seek him while he may be found. O stifle not that blessed influence—quench not that heavenly spark—ask like the trembling Paul, “ Lord, what wouldest thou have me to do ?” Intreat with David—“ O send out thy light and thy truth, let *them* lead me !” Rest not another moment of your life in that fatal and too common delusion, that religion is a general *more* than a personal concern, and that the great God of heaven and earth cannot be moved or influenced by supplication.

Religion is undoubtedly a matter of general concern ; but only as it is of individual moment ; only as it is made up of personal interests. Nothing can be so deadly to the welfare of the soul as to rest upon generalities in a case of such immense importance. No error can be so manifestly preposterous—and, were it not for its most awful consequences, none could be considered so absurd. That your particular course

* John xvii. 20.

of conduct is countenanced by the example of thousands and of millions, can never prove it to be a right course,—and however comfortable a false view of things may render it in this world to have a multitude of associates in guilt and folly, and wrong opinions, it is a comfort which must end at the gates of death. Those dismal portals must be passed *alone*; there all companionship ceases; there you must transact with God for *yourself*! O what a moment in which to begin this awful communion!—well might the prophet say, “*Prepare to meet thy God!*” Prepare whilst yet on hearing, reading, praying ground—join not the multitude to do evil—they will be no multitude for you when stretched upon your dying bed. Let them, then, be nothing to you now. It was for you that Christ died—it was for you that his Gospel is preached—it was for you that the Scriptures were written—“that through patience and comfort of them you might have hope.” It is to plead and to intercede for you, that Jesus lives at the right hand of God. It was to comfort you that such exceeding rich and precious promises were given. Do but realize them by an

act of faith, and it may be said of you, in the language of St. Paul, "all things are yours; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours. And ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's *."

* 1 Cor. iii. 21—23.

CHAPTER VI.

ON THE LOSS OF OPPORTUNITIES.

“Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave whither thou goest.”

ECCLES. ix. 10.

IN retracing the events of departed years, there generally mingles with many other painful feelings, a sentiment of remorse for the loss of various opportunities of a beneficial change of circumstances which might happen to accompany them.

It is not unprofitable to a thoughtful mind to dwell in its own instance, and also in that of others, upon the train of ideas to which this common feeling of self-reproach gives birth.

In the case of those whose religious principles are loose and undefined, this retrospective act of the mind commonly fixes upon the strong point of worldly interest; and as that has been

obstructed or advanced by any negligence in the use of opportunities, in the same proportion is the strength of self-accusation; and it is curious to remark upon such occasions, how often those who are apparently the nearest to the end of their career, and to whom it will shortly be of no consequence whatever, whether they lived rich or poor, in high rank or in low, are to be heard amongst the most vehement of self-reprovers, and the most sincere of penitents, for every oversight of which they were guilty in not availing themselves of such advantages as were offered to their acceptance.

“ Ah! if I had bought that field,” exclaims the covetous possessor of already more than he can occupy, “ I might now have been worth so many thousands.”

“ Had I but followed up that business,” observes the ambitious man, “ I might now have been distinguished by rank and title.”

“ Had I but accepted such or such proposals,” sighs the faded coquette, “ I might now have been riding in my coach and four!”— In short, “ had I but done this or that, the bias of my fate would have been totally dif-

ferent, and I should have enjoyed a far more ample share of happiness."

Such is the language of the worldly mind ; and it is reasonable to expect that it should be so. But worldly persons are those who gaze through a labyrinth at distant and confused objects, amidst which the prominent point of self-interest alone engages their notice. But how miscalled—how misunderstood the term ! What is the real interest of a rational, an immortal being, and what is the injury to that interest which he has the most cause to deplore ? Can it be the loss of wealth which he can carry with him no further than the grave ? Can it be the loss of honours which are then also to be relinquished ? Can it, in short, be any thing which has upon it the marks of nothingness and decay, as all things have which relate only to a world from which we are continually passing away ?

There can be no comparison in the remorse which is due to any neglect upon these subjects, and that which ought to accompany a consciousness of having failed to use the opportunities that may have occurred for the

improvement of the concerns which relate to eternity.

Such opportunities cannot fail to have offered themselves to most persons who have made any progress in the career of life. Upon a subject that presents such variety, it would be impossible to enter into detail.

There is, however, one species of opportunity for spiritual improvement, which few have not had presented to them. I mean that which results from affliction; and, as the Christian considers this to be one which more directly and manifestly proceeds from the hand of God, it is one on which he bestows the most serious and devout attention; and it is the Christian alone who can truly be benefitted by any review of the past. Nothing but a religious principle, and a very strong religious principle, can render endurable this painful process of the mind.

It is not, perhaps, uncommon to hear persons protesting with a sentiment of thankfulness that, in looking back upon the past, they find no cause for self-reproach; but these are persons with whom we have nothing to do; we presume that we are addressing a class of

beings who, in professing and calling themselves Christians, are in some measure sensible of the humility and contrition which their code of morality so forcibly inculcates. In the best of his actions the devout believer finds much matter for humiliation; much ground to pronounce himself "an unprofitable servant." It is to this person that a review of past existence, with all its varieties of incident and means of change, presents a book, than which (except the Bible) none can be more beneficially perused. "At that turning point of life," he says, "I first thought upon God.—That cross—that disappointment—that affliction was the leading step."

This is a view of sorrow which sanctifies it to its proper use. It is making the opportunity serve its appointed end. And what an opportunity! sent from heaven to wean man from his folly. "Lo! all these things worketh God oftentimes with man, to bring back his soul from the pit, to be enlightened with the light of the living*." "Affliction is only God's

* Job xxxiii. 29, 30.

speaking louder," says good Mr. Adam, but, alas! "God speaketh once, yea twice, yet man perceiveth it not *."

Amongst the events of life, none generally make so vivid, but so transient an impression, as those which inflict suffering. They are, in truth, like the lightning's flash "which is gone ere we can say it lightens." Doubtless it is the result of a merciful law in the constitution of our nature, that the idea of pain should not be permitted, by dwelling upon the memory after the reality has passed away, to harass us with imaginary, as well as actual misery. But, as the means of conducting us to the knowledge of the truth—of weaning us from vanity, and of loosening the ties which bind us to the love of earthly things, it is well to prolong the remembrance of sorrow—it is well to make the most of such an opportunity—to strive at maintaining the subdued and contrite spirit, which, by the blessing of divine grace, generally accompanies misfortune—to preserve the heart and affections in that softened state which

* Job xxxiii. 14.

renders them prompt to take the mould of religion ; since such an occasion once lost, though apt enough to return, as the vicissitudes of life too truly prove, returns to a mind which the world has hardened—which time has seared, and which offers but a sterile soil to the good seed of the heavenly husbandman.

It is a melancholy, but an indisputable fact, that affliction, when it fails to soften the heart, tends to harden and deprave it. It cannot be neutral in its operations. It presents means which it remains with us to use in the service of God or of Satan ; and let us never be reluctant to investigate on which side we have engaged their operation. Let us suppose the case (in early life it is a very common one) of a disappointed attachment ; under whatever circumstances it may occur, it presents an occasion of turning the heart to God. Admitting that it is of a kind (as it often is) which renders it to all but the parties concerned, a blessing, rather than a disappointment—that from the wilfulness, or imprudence, or inconsistency that accompanies it, but small commiseration appears to be its due ; still the fact of its pro-

ducing sorrow is not to be questioned; and if this sorrow be increased by feelings of remorse for misconduct, there is an additional inducement for the wounded mind to renounce the vanities that have deceived it, and rise to the contemplation of something better. It has cause for humiliation—it has an occasion for its exercise—for the exercise of a meek and lowly temper; a disposition of heart, which, in the sight of God, is of great price.

But where a sense of disappointment is not thus painfully augmented by remorse, it has still the same tendency, when rightly used, to sanctify the heart and subdue the will. Young persons require such lessons. Every thing in youth tends to foster self-complacency; an assurance of success accompanies every undertaking; the pride of life is then at its height; and whilst the snares of strong and undisciplined affections beset them on every side, the sacred caution to “keep the heart with all diligence,” is unheard and unheeded. There, where lies the seed of evil—the root of passion—the beginning of crime—there, where the character is hourly forming, and the individual

training for happiness or misery, even as relates to this life—there, where the mischief is most deadly, it is too commonly undetected and unopposed. A bewitching loveliness hangs upon the dreams of a young and ardent imagination. It feels a capacity for happiness, which clamours for indulgence ; and this sweet object asks its notice—and that—and that—till the deluded heart luxuriates in its treasury of bliss, and wonders what is meant by sorrow.

It may be observed that this is natural, but we confidently reply, that it is not the less dangerous, or the less to be discouraged on that account. “The natural mind,” we are told from high authority, “is enmity against God ;” and we soon perceive that it actually is so. We soon perceive to what this buoyancy of spirits conducts, unless it be tempered with divine grace ;—and amongst the many exquisite sorrows that “flesh is heir to,” perhaps few exceed in bitterness those which spring from the indulgence of an ardent and restless imagination.

The case we have supposed of disappointed affections, is most commonly to be traced up

to this source. Young persons seldom love wisely—however ardently; and there are few of them, if sincere, who would not, in after life, look back with emotions of dissatisfaction, upon the mistaken manner in which they had, upon this point, permitted fancy to usurp the place of reason. But whilst many may have cause for regret, whose low and defective views prevent their sanctifying such regret to its proper use, it is to be hoped that some may be found, whom this very painful path of tribulation has led directly to the gate of heaven. It cannot be doubted, that in the backward glance of memory, many persons are enabled to trace their first experience in the mysterious ways of Providence, to the sufferings of a disappointed heart. There can scarcely, in the variety of ways in which it pleases God to work upon the souls of his creatures, be any more effective. The feelings are softened—the heart is tender—broken—and subdued—the prop on which it leaned is gone—it wants support—it wants an object, since that on which it so fondly reposed is taken away—it pines for consolation—but believes that there

is none—it looks round for it—but with a hopelessness that borders on despair.—There was but one—but one dear cherished object—it is gone—and what is life?—ah, what is life? the sick heart asks with tears. In other griefs much may yet remain to charm the senses, and amuse the fancy; but a disappointment of this kind casts a withering blight on every blossom of imagination—on every bud of hope. The world is no longer that land of promise which the fond enthusiast painted it—but a waste and howling wilderness—a dreary void—a scene of desolation, from which the weary spirit pants to be emancipated.

Ah! what a season for religious thought! What a moment for the “still small voice!” What an interval for the gracious influence of God’s good Spirit! What an hour for Him to speak, whose voice the stormy winds and waves obeyed!

You ask for comfort—for shelter from the storms of fate that beat so rudely on your defenceless head. You walk upon the waves of misfortune—and are about to sink. But see he stretches forth his hand—he calls you

to approach—he bids you, “Come.” Alas! like faithless Peter, you doubt his power; and why is this? Why must this blessed opportunity, which courts you to accept it, why must it fade away, unvalued and unused? Why should it be permitted to augment the anguish of remorse which waits upon the remembrance of neglected advantages?

“Alas!” you cry, “it was but the indulgence of a fond affection—but this I asked—and that for a creature so worthy of it!—Life was but gilded by its presence—social communion only dear by its discourse—its smile my solace—its tenderness my treasure.—It was but the continuance of this I asked!” Well might our heavenly Master reprove the misguided requests of his disciples—well might he caution them, “ye know not what ye ask”—“ye know not what spirit ye are of!”—and well might they implore him, “Lord teach us how to pray!” How often have prayers been addressed to the throne of grace which, if fulfilled, would issue in the most tremendous sorrows!

In the instance before us, the misguided

being prays for the continuance of an imagined blessing ; but what does the very prayer imply ? A supplication for the continuance of a snare, which is chaining the heart to an earthly idol—which is making the centre of attachment this poor perishing world, and is exciting the inordinate affection which the word of God forbids, and which reason proves that the objects of this world can never requite or satisfy—which is interposing an unceasing obstruction in the way of all communion between God and the soul, unfitting it for the enjoyment of pure and simple pleasures here, and totally disabling it for that state of calm and tranquil thought, which inclines it to pursue the occupations that are qualified to prepare it for a better world hereafter.

We have dwelt, perhaps something too long, upon this instance of a valuable opportunity, because it appeared to be, especially in early life, of more frequent occurrence than many others.

But as Mr. Cecil justly remarks, “ a volume might be written on the various methods which God has taken, in his providence, to lead men

first to think of Him." A fit of sickness, the loss of a dear friend, an awakening sermon, a powerfully written book, are circumstances which must repeatedly have made appeals to the hearts and consciences of most persons, presenting opportunities the most precious that can be named. But, precious as they are, few are the minds that deplore their loss. The broad points of worldly interest stand in the foreground of the scenes which memory pictures, whilst the realities of heaven and immortality, though the most sublime of objects, yet shrouded by the clouds of passion, are but feebly defined, if not wholly lost to view.

But there is an hour of truth to all, an hour when the darkness of error yields to the light of conscience. Though long delayed, the sun of righteousness will rise on all created beings, revealing the truth. Blessed are those to whom he comes "with healing in his wings." But what must be the anguish of those to whom his beams disclose but sights of horror! sights of lost talents, that might have worked for heaven—of hours, and days, and years worse than neglected! To contemplate this, to think but

for an instant of the veil of passion raised by death, and the misguided sinner waking in eternity, and gazing upon *truth*—truth that he would not hear of—would not look upon in life—disdaining her simplicity, and loathing her demands. She was severe, perhaps, but only in a momentary glance. Pursued and grasped, she would have turned upon her follower a countenance indeed of awful majesty, but hourly melting into beauty and to love. Forsaken and despised, her hour of triumph come, (and come it must—the dominion of truth *must* be established in this world or the next) how awful is her victory! O what a face she wears—with what a voice she speaks! Her guilty foe averts his horror-stricken sight. He asks for mercy, but, wretched suppliant, he asks in vain. Death has sealed his doom—his false betrayer comes no more between that awful form and him—or comes but to demand his victim—his willing, self-devoted victim. Now where is his rock of refuge, where is *his* Saviour?

His Saviour!—miserable man!—*his* Saviour! what, did Jesus die for him, whose whole exist-

ence was a scoff and mockery of his very name? for him whose heavy reckoning is perhaps augmented by the rebels he has made against the cause of Christ? This were, indeed, to mock the name of justice. No; he must pay the price that falsehood asks, the price of his immortal soul. O but for one—but one of those unheeded opportunities that now come back from the abyss of years, to tell him of their value—to tell him how insanelly they were cast away. Those gifts, that mind, that understanding, that capacity to comprehend and grasp the truth, that influence and power to recommend it to the choice of others—his health—his wealth—his youth—his strength—not a precious gift of God, but comes with its upbraidings. Can we not well imagine that, as some one has forcibly remarked, “hell is truth seen too late?” Can we indeed doubt that “the worm that never dies, the fire that never is quenched,” figuratively represents those unceasing gnawings of remorse, those undying flames of an accusing conscience, which we may conceive to be the portion of an impenitent sinner, when departed days shall rise with their

fearful register of abused advantages and neglected opportunities, to overwhelm him with dismay? It is an opportunity of spiritual improvement, then, which it the most behoves us to seize with the greatest avidity. This is, in truth, the "one thing needful"—"the good part which never can be taken away from us," if we sedulously endeavour to avail ourselves of it. A lost estate—a lost honour—a lost accomplishment, which timely exertions might have made our own, should claim from us but small regret, for these are amongst the things which death reduces to nothing. But to have passed over an occasion for religious advancement, presents a subject for remorse, which is forcibly expressed in the words of the prophet—"Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backslidings shall reprove thee; know therefore and see, that it is an evil thing and bitter, that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God, and that my fear is not in thee, saith the Lord of Hosts *."

* Jer. ii. 19,

CHAPTER VII.

ON PRAYER.

“ Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief.” MARK ix. 24.

THE truth of the Scripture narratives is, in few circumstances, more strongly confirmed, than in the strokes of nature and feeling which occasionally break from the characters of which they speak. Brief as they are, they mark with precision the state of mind which distinguished the subject of them ; and perhaps in no instance is this more strikingly exemplified, than in the burst of mingled and deep emotion which is exhibited in the few words that stand at the head of this chapter.

Our blessed Lord, after discoursing privately with his favoured disciples, Peter and James and John, on returning to the others, perceived

a great multitude, and the scribes questioning with them. He inquires the cause, and is answered by a person amongst them, that he had brought his son, afflicted from his childhood by an evil spirit, and had besought his disciples to cast him out, but they could not.

Jesus having reproved their want of faith, commands that the afflicted person should be brought to him, which is done—the evil spirit at that moment powerfully disturbing him.

We may conceive the state of the father's mind in the pause that ensues, whilst our Lord inquires the particulars of the case. We more than conceive it—we fully enter into his feelings, when having answered his question, he adds, “But if thou canst do any thing, have compassion on us, and help us.”

And what is the prompt reply which our hearts, in unison with the anxious parent's would suggest, when the compassionate Lord of all thus soothes to rest his natural fears and doubts?

“If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth.”

What, but the vivid flash of fervent faith,

that with tears cries out, "Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief."

What a comprehensive prayer ! what a model for the soul which knows not, but sincerely desires to know, the benefit of salvation ! what testimony of a trusting spirit !

Lord, I believe ! I believe that thou art able to save my child—I believe that thou art all-wise, all-powerful, all-merciful ; but sin and Satan tempt me to despair, nevertheless I cleave to thee as to my all—help—help my unbelief !

And did he pray in vain ? Do any of us pray in vain, who thus come to the feet of the Saviour, and ask him to remove the veil of infidelity that shrouds him from our view ? O never—never did this simple but heaven-born supplication, sincerely uttered, fail of acceptance and reward.

But when is it sincerely uttered ? When is it that, like the agonized father in the Gospel, we " cry out with tears" for help from our deliverer ? When is it that a sense of want and infirmity so powerfully operates ; and till it does so operate, what can be the strength and value

of our supplications? If there is no desire for a gift, how can the entreaty for it be otherwise than languid? And here it is to be doubted that the sincere supplicants at the throne of grace are but few. As the poet has remarked—

“What various hindrances we meet
In coming to a mercy-seat.”

But truly may we add with him—

“Yet who that knows the worth of prayer,
But wishes to be often there.”

Who, indeed!—the mind, awakened by the slightest sense of its helplessness, will readily repeat.

But *when* is it thus awakened? Can we admit it to be an evidence of an awakened mind, merely to adopt certain external forms of devotion, without regulating the life by steady influential principles of religion? Can we conceive that a bare consecration of an allotted portion of time to sacred duties, the daily reading perhaps of a chapter in the Bible, the daily repetition of a form of prayer, a regular attend-

ance upon the ordinances of public worship, and a regular appropriation of a certain portion of time and money to works of charity, can we indeed believe that this is the whole sum and substance of Christianity? Such accompaniments of it are doubtless of much value, and are, in fact, indispensable, as testimonies of faith. But no error is more common than that of mistaking a sign for the thing signified,—and without fear of contradiction, we may venture to affirm, that a regular, and as far as it goes, an estimable rule of life may, and unquestionably in many instances does subsist, in minds that are totally insensible to the great cause in which they imagine themselves to be enlisted.

There is but one test of spiritual life, which is the Word of God. “To the law and to the testimony,” if the life and conduct “speak not according to this Word,” it is, as the prophet adds, “because there is no light in them*.”

“For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither,

* Isa. viii. 20.

but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater ;

“ So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth ; it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it *.”

Go then, we would say to a candid and inquiring mind, (and to any other than a candid mind advice is generally superfluous) go to the Holy Scriptures, and like David make them “ a lamp unto your feet, and a light unto your paths.” In this particular case of prayer, examine yourself *by them*. Do not dwell upon externals ; these may obviously be assumed by the worst of men. Do not, like the Pharisee, recount the number and quality of your virtuous deeds, or compare yourself with others who may not have your advantages, and consequently not your responsibility. Outward forms are the signs and tokens of the internal spirit, but they are not the spirit itself ; and it

* Isaiah lv. 10, 11.

is the Spirit which giveth life to every thing else. Do you then come to the duties of private devotion as to the exercise of a privilege, or to the performance of a task? Does a sense of grievous want and infirmity constrain you to seek the aid of prayer with an urgency that compels you to exclaim with David, "my soul is athirst for God, yea, even for the living God! when shall I come to appear before God?" When shall I lay down this load of earthliness and sin which bow me to the ground; when shall I see him as he is; when shall I exchange this state of thralldom for the "glorious liberty of the children of God?" Do you recognize it to *be* a state of thralldom; do you feel it pressing you in on every side in the shape of corrupt inclinations, stubborn tempers, rising passions, sordid feelings, and such unceasing and innumerable temptations, that, with St. Paul, you are ready to cry out, "Oh wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" and whilst you thus deplore your guilt, do you contemplate with the eye of faith the great Captain of your salvation; do you rush to his protection; do you cast

yourself with tears before him, protesting your belief: "Lord I believe, help thou mine unbelief!" *Is this your prayer; this one simple supplication? Try yourself by that. Do you pour it forth with energetic fervour; with such a fervour as a sincere desire to be a believer in Christianity would certainly inspire? O pause awhile, and meditate on this. You will perhaps reply that your temperament is calm, and that impassioned emotions are to you impossible. It is readily admitted that the strength of an emotion will considerably vary in different dispositions. But where, it may be asked, is the disposition so torpid as to make no efforts to obtain what it believes would contribute to its happiness? Contemplate the persons amongst your acquaintance whom you consider to be the most inaccessible on the side of feeling. When their worldly interests are endangered, do you find them sluggish and incapable of exercising energetic efforts? It is possible indeed there may exist a case of such inveterate indolence or imbecility of mind, that no representation of danger or difficulty can be made to act upon. But this is to be reckoned amongst the extra-*

ordinary, not the ordinary course of things. We may generally remark that the most apathetic persons display activity enough in the pursuit of what they suppose to be their interest. But do not wander long in search of examples; in this great question it is with yourself that you have the chief concern: then reflect how you yourself would act if you were continually beset by cruel enemies, who harassed your peace, and rendered existence sometimes burdensome to you, and you knew that the aid of a powerful being to deliver you from their attacks was always to be procured upon the simple condition of your sincerely asking for it. Would you then be languid in your supplications? Probably you smile and say there is no analogy in such an instance with the subject of prayer.

But unless you disbelieve the word of God, or are very ignorant of your own heart, you will be compelled to allow that there is an analogy in it. However happy your natural temper, however eminent your acquired advantages, you will perceive in the innumerable infirmities which *will* cling to you as long as you are in the body, many strong opponents to uninter-

rupted tranquillity. You may be so happy, by the bountiful goodness of God, as to possess a sweet and even temper, which the untoward events of life do not much disturb or irritate. If so, you have an increased demand upon your gratitude, but not less upon your vigilance. Your peculiar temptation is not on that side; but do you venture to believe that because it is not of a violent or obtrusive kind, that you are altogether exempt from temptation? So far from it, that probably no person has more need to use the prayer of the Psalmist, "O send out thy light and thy truth let them lead me!" than he whose gentleness of nature is in danger of misleading him to suppose that he is exempt from its corruptions. But admitting that you believe all is right within you; that your passions are subjected to strict discipline, that no wayward bursts of temper ever disturb you; no unholy desires, no envyings, no heart burnings, no discontent, no unguarded words or thoughts to be repented or regretted, have you yet nothing to ask with earnestness at the throne of grace? Bring the general state of your affections to the light of Scripture. "Thou shalt

love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength."

Do you so love him? do you in any kind or degree, proportioned to the demand, so render up to Him the affections of your soul? Again, "Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth *."

Are your affections thus weaned from the world, are they thus set upon heaven? You must not dispose of the question by replying that human nature is incapable of this exalted love, and *therefore* cannot attain unto it. *Mere* human nature, we admit, is incapable of it; but if you profess yourself a believer in Christ, you ought to be made a partaker of that regenerated nature which his holy Spirit bestows, and which, though continually falling short, is still continually *aiming* to walk by these holy rules. Such rules the renewed soul well knows would never have been laid down, if they were not to regulate its conduct; and whatever difficulties and failures it *may* and *must* find to mourn over

* Col. iii. 2.

in its endeavours to follow them, it has no desire to explain away or lower demands so just, and so well fitted to promote the glory of God.

A Christian then, whatever be his gifts, will always feel as a poor, frail, helpless mortal ought to feel, and as he *must* feel if he be sincere in his profession of faith. He will feel that, respecting the very first and greatest of his Maker's laws, which demands an entire surrender of his affections to the God who made him, he is an offender and a rebel. Where lives the man who is not guilty upon this point? and where lives the Christian, who, upon this point, does not feel the necessity, the blessing of prayer, and who fails to pour it forth with an earnestness adequate to his consciousness of deficiency. All other gifts and graces are, in his estimation, faint and low when compared with a holy love to God as revealed in a reconciled Redeemer. This is the crowning blessing for which his soul aspires; he pants to be delivered from the bondage of a corrupt and grovelling nature, which would blind his eyes and harden his heart, and keep him as far as possible from the Saviour who has bought him. But though he thus

laments his captivity, does he tamely submit to it ; does he feel himself conquered and bend to the yoke ? No ; like Gideon of old, “ faint yet pursuing,” is his motto. Like David, “ his soul follows hard” after his spiritual friend ; for he knows that he *has* a spiritual friend ; he knows that it is “ no cunningly devised fable” he has believed ; he knows in whom he has placed his confidence, and like Job he declares “ that though he slay him, yet will he trust him ;” praying only “ that his faith fail not,” since faith, faith alone, he sees to be the anchor which never must he part from, though his fierce enemy would wrest it from him. “ Lord I believe, help thou mine unbelief !” is his constant entreaty. If such be the prayer of the advanced believer, what need has he who halts between opposite opinions to give it utterance !

“ Faith is the gift of God,” that precious principle, without which the best services of his creatures are utterly valueless. “ He that cometh to God, must believe that he *is*,” and that he is what he proclaims himself to be, “ a rewarder of all those that diligently seek him.” But it has been well observed, that “ believing

is the hardest work in the world." " Though faith and obedience," says Bishop Hopkins, " are the conditions which God requires for the obtaining of salvation, yet these conditions are themselves as much the free gift of God, as the salvation promised upon them. By whom they are required, by the same God they are effectually wrought in the hearts of all those who shall be saved. If it be said, " True ; it is impossible for us to believe unless God enable us, yet this doth not prove that it is not in our own power to believe ; for without the assistance of God and his influence, we cannot think, nor speak, nor move. In him, saith the Apostle, we live and move and have our being. Yet who is so unreasonable as to say, that because these are God's gifts, therefore we do not perform them by our own power ? So likewise, though faith be the gift of God, yet it may also be in the power of nature."

To this reasoning the Bishop replies, " that some actions depend upon the concurrence of common providence ; others upon the influence of special grace. And this I apprehend to be the true difference between these two ; that the

former are wrought in us by God, without the reluctance and opposition of our natural faculties ; but the latter against the bent and bias of our natures, which are now corrupted by the fall. And therefore we may affirm that the obedience which Adam performed during his continuance in the state of innocence, was but a common work wrought in him by God's common influence ; but our faith and the same obedience in us, though it be far more imperfect, is from special grace ; because in him it was wrought suitably to the tendency of his nature ; but in us contrary to all its appetites and inclinations, which in this lapsed state of mankind are wholly evil and corrupt. And thus much the Apostle intimates to us concerning faith, Eph. i. 18, 19, 20. " That ye might know what is the exceeding greatness of his power towards us who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ when he raised him from the dead," therefore was the power which God declared in raising Christ from the dead, an extraordinary and special power, because it was contrary to the course of nature, and far above the ability

of any created agent to effect ; and such, saith he, “ is the power that worketh faith in us.” How much then does it behove rational beings to follow the advice of the Apostle, and “ examine themselves whether they be in the faith,” whether the prayers they offer to God “ have an unction from the Holy One,” a living spirit, or whether they be a mere “ form of godliness” without its power.

We cannot well deceive ourselves in so obvious a case, unless we live in such a habit of self-deceit as renders us entire strangers to our own hearts—a pernicious, but alas ! a most prevailing habit ! We want courage for the task of self-examination ; we have a presentiment that we shall behold something wrong within us, and like a sick man, oppressed with a disease which he knows to be incurable, we shrink from bringing our case into notice ; we are glad to forget it altogether, hoping that if we do not exactly recover, we shall still not die. But the infatuation which may be pardoned to him who suffers under bodily ills, for which he perceives no remedy, is surely not to be passed by in beings who have only to ask,

and to obtain relief. But here we arrive at the root of the evil; here we perceive the foundation of the listlessness, the languor, the unwillingness with which devotional duties are too commonly performed. The generality of persons do not believe. They think they do, or rather, they do not think about it; they put it amongst the things which they are willing to take for granted. Strange carelessness! marvellous inconsistency, an aberration of understanding which, upon no other subject of importance, could have place in a mind that was endowed with reason. Let us illustrate the case by supposing that a faint hope was held out to a person of common sense, that he was the rightful heir to an estate which the misconduct of his ancestors had caused to be withheld from him; that his title to it could only be understood by the attentive study of certain deeds and documents, in which he would find his claim established upon his compliance with some prescribed conditions clearly laid down and explained. Is it to be believed that the man would be indifferent, or postpone the examination of these papers, or set about it lan-

guidly, if he really thought that, by carefully perusing them, he should be able to establish his claim? on the contrary, would not his exertions increase with his hopes, would he think any labour tedious, any difficulty insupportable if it held out but a chance of assisting him to obtain his object?

We may well conceive deep solicitude to be exercised upon this temporal affair—but how hardly can we *imagine* any fervent endeavours to be used in the acquisition of that inheritance which time can never diminish, nor corruption destroy, but “which is incorruptible, undefiled, and fadeth not away.”

This can only be accounted for, by repeating the assertion, that comparatively but few persons are believers. “The tree is known by its fruits,” and the fruits of faith must be solicitude, anxiety, labour, and intense desire to know our interest in the objects of faith. It is a manifest absurdity to talk of calmness or supineness to the man who is in earnest about the salvation of his immortal soul. A man may be calm and tranquil who knows not, and cares not, if he has a soul to be saved or not. A man may be calm and tranquil who rests in his own

opinions, and is satisfied that they are wiser and better than those he finds in the Bible—in short, a man may be calm and tranquil, who discredits the whole revealed scheme of human redemption; but let a man once believe that what the Scriptures tell him is true, that he is spiritually dead, that he is in a fallen state, that God himself has pronounced “the imagination of his heart to be evil from his youth * ;”

That the Saviour who died for him has declared that he must be born again of the Spirit, or “else he cannot enter into the kingdom of God † ;”

Let him believe this, and let him really agree with the assertion of Peter, “neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved ‡;”

And we deny that the man can be calm or careless in seeking to know his interest in this saving name. He would as soon be calm and careless whilst walking blindfold upon the edge of a precipice. What then, we would once

* Genesis viii. 21.

† John iii. 3.

‡ Acts iv. 12.

more ask, is the inference to be drawn from the unconscious, unanimated state of the world around us upon these immensely important points? Is it not that they are infidels? The term is strong, but truth is seldom the less wholesome for being plain and unqualified. It is nothing for a man to say that he believes in a God. The case is simply this. There is a revelation from heaven. It tells us we are sinners—we know ourselves to be such—or we know nothing.

Are we willing to accept that redemption from the desert of sin which the same revelation makes known?

There is no room for qualification—there is no ground for disputing—there is no place for pride in this dispensation. It pleases God, in his absolute sovereignty, to hold up “Christ crucified,” as our only means of restoration to his favour—our only method of salvation from his wrath. Is he to us, as “to the Jews, a stumbling block,” or as “to the Greeks foolishness;” or is he (and blessed be our lot if it be so) made unto us “the power of God, and the wisdom of God?”

To the person thus illuminated, no counsel need to be addressed, to prosecute continual supplications at the mercy seat for the continuance of the gift of faith. But to one not stedfast in the cause, how can we offer a more perfect model of intense intreaty than that which the prayer of the afflicted father in the Gospel supplies. Perhaps, like him, you stand trembling and doubting the power of your Redeemer. The desire to believe may be dawning in your heart. Oh! if it be thus, “take words” and turn to your compassionate Lord. Think of him as though invisible to sense, yet living to save and to serve all who truly call upon him. He views the yet imperfect purpose ere it has formed itself in language. He hears the faintest sigh that breathes to him for aid. “*If thou canst believe*”—but ah! perhaps you cannot. Then ask him yet the more to take away the stony heart so hard and so impenetrable. “Lord, I believe—thou knowest I would believe if faith were in my power. But it is thy gift—bestow it upon me—help—help mine unbelief!”

“I will not let thee go, except thou bless

me," has been the language of every true aspirant after divine favour since the days of the Patriarch who first used it, and "prevailed with God"—and though delayed till nature is ready to faint with disappointed expectations, the answer of peace will surely come—"Great is thy faith, be it unto thee even as thou wilt."

CHAPTER VIII.

ON THE ADVANTAGES OF CULTIVATING A TASTE FOR SIMPLE PLEASURES.

“ And yet I say unto you, that even Solomon, in all his glory, was not arrayed like one of these.”

MATT. vi. 29.

ONE very important benefit which arises from religion, is the habit it inspires of being pleased with simplicity. The pleasures and the employments of a religious person are all distinguished by this characteristic—that they are simple—and this characteristic it is which, to an irreligious person, stamps them at once with an insipidity the most insufferable.

A love of excitement is the strong and peculiar feature of a worldly mind, and may commonly be found at the root of most evil ways. If we could investigate the characters of those

who have been eminently unfortunate in their conduct and in their circumstances, we should seldom fail to discover that they were early distinguished by an insensibility to quiet, simple pleasures, and only to be amused by such means as excited their feelings and passions, rather than their taste or intellect. It would be going too far to say, that there never was an instance of a restless unhappy person who had been gifted with a love for quiet and simple pleasures, such particularly as flow from a delight in the beauties of nature ; but we believe that comparatively few, but *very* few such persons are to be found amongst the disturbers of public or domestic peace. Madame de Stael has justly and beautifully remarked, that “ the aspect of nature inspires resignation ;” and whence is it that it does so ? Surely it must be from the pure and simple thoughts it excites in the mind.

Our blessed Lord has told us, that “ if the eye be single the whole body is full of light.” It can hardly be deemed a fanciful and forced construction of this passage to conceive of it, as intended to convey to us, the most extended

and comprehensive view of the desirableness of simplicity. In its more direct and obvious sense, it certainly alludes to a single and sole devotion of the heart to heavenly pursuits, as the preceding verses testify, wherein we are exhorted to lay up for ourselves treasures in heaven. But the maxims of our Divine Master, as emanating from the fountain of wisdom and truth, are generally found, upon an attentive consideration of them, to touch upon every possible modification of the subjects they treat of.

In the present case, we can scarcely fail to receive the remarks upon "the single eye" as closely connected with purity of purpose, not only in heavenly but also in earthly pursuits.

In fact, it is impossible to disunite truth and simplicity. The man who studies the Word of God with a view to its being influential, in so far as he is sincere, must be a single-minded man; and no attainment is much more to be desired than this. That God made his creatures originally upright, but that "they have sought out many inventions," is a scriptural truth, which experience sufficiently confirms.

If we knew what was good for us, can it be doubted but that the greater part of the pleasures which are considered by the world as not only innocent, but rational, would speedily be sacrificed? They may justly be designated as "inventions," means devised by the great enemy of souls to blind the eyes, and mislead the minds of those who pursue them. Can we, for instance, put in the same competition in the scale of enjoyment, the feelings which are excited by a lovely landscape, and those which generally accompany the exhibitions of a theatre or a ball-room? It will be doubtless replied, "enjoy them both; they do not necessarily destroy one another—you may with perfect consistency encourage a predilection for all these pleasures. But we doubt this—we doubt whether the delighted frequenter of the theatre, or the assembly, or any other haunt of dissipation, is the *really* gratified observer of the pure and simple attractions of nature.

There may be, undoubtedly, and in every mind of taste there must be, a sweet and pleasing emotion arising from the contemplation of the beautiful works of God; but this is evanes-

cent and unimportant, and by no means influential, when it is opposed by a love for other pleasures, which the corruption of human nature finds to be much more congenial to it. You may see many persons whom the world ranks amongst the foremost of its disciples, who not only seem, but actually are, in a measure, transported with scenes of natural beauty; but if you would know how far this enjoyment extends, endeavour to prevail upon them to exchange the glittering circles of gaiety for the calm and retired loveliness of nature, and you will then discover that the complicated and involved associations which mingle with and alloy the amusements of the one, are nevertheless by habit become so attractive, as to overbalance the simple charms of the other. Ask the frequenter of a theatre, or a ball-room, or a card-table, to sacrifice these poor delights to the real satisfaction which a summer's evening walk is so well fitted to impart. Ask him to contrast the chaste beams of the soft moonlight, the gentle murmur of the fluttering foliage, the still and sober shade of twilight, and all the pensive imagery which nurses sweet

and profitable meditation, with the glare of flickering lamps, the din of babbling tongues, the heat, the tumult of a crowded assembly, met together for no apparent purpose but to murder time and thought as best they may; and you may speak with more than human eloquence, but you will speak in vain. The sight is blinded, the taste is polluted—the person you address, may see beauty in these things which you admire so much, when he has nothing else to do but to attend to them. But he now sees superior beauty in other objects, and when they present themselves, they claim his preferable notice. Now this is one mistake, and a deadly mistake it is, which religion rectifies. She not only calls things by their right names, but she exhibits them in their right natures. No sophistry has she to prompt her “to put sweet for bitter, and bitter for sweet;” and hence it is that a really converted person, who has wandered long in the intricate path of worldly pleasures, finds no lesson so difficult as that indispensable one which she enforces, of loving and pursuing simplicity.

“The way of transgressors is hard,” the

wise man says, and no way is indeed harder than theirs. It is hard to break off a habit of any kind, but the evil habits which an inordinate love of strong excitement fosters, are the hardest of any to subdue. They "grow by what they feed upon;" and as well could the winds and waves be impeded in their course, as the indulged impulses of a mind which has been accustomed to excitement, unless that mind be brought into subjection to the highest principles of religion. It is a sort of moral intoxication, which, however insidiously it may begin its attacks, is sure to end in the total subversion of the better part of our nature. The faculty which of all others requires restraint in the human mind, is the imagination, and that is unfortunately the one which an ill-regulated and unguarded education the most contributes to nourish. It is the great inlet to the various corruptions of the heart, and by it the character and the destiny (humanly speaking) of the individual is principally determined. In many minds this dangerous faculty is so sluggish as to indicate no hazard to its possessor. These are persons whose path through

life we shall probably observe to be undeviating and safe, in so far as respects the danger of incurring the sorrows which wait upon those that love and admire too much; and it is not, therefore, to them that strong admonitions upon this point, require to be particularly addressed. Seeing nothing but what appears, they are never likely to be misled by those vagrant visions of heated fancy which captivate the heart, and prepare it to be offered as a sacrifice to the first deluding snare that falls in its way. It is the over-estimation of enjoyment which this wild faculty produces, that occasions a great part of the misery that fills the world. Young persons, more especially, spurning the calm realities that surround them, and turning with distaste from the simple enjoyments which a state of health and competence and youth would place within their reach, are always embittering the present by vain aspirations after some distant, and probably, unprofitable acquisition. The pleasures which experience proves to be the best adapted to our present condition, lie scattered about us in profusion. It needs not a refined or a cultivated taste to "enjoy

them richly." It requires, indeed, a quietude of spirit to enter fully into their character, and to reap the whole benefit they are so well fitted to bestow. It demands perhaps also a love of truth. One can hardly conceive an artful or complicated mind, delighting itself in the pure simplicity of nature. "The busy haunts of men" are the fit resort for such a mind, not the tranquil shades of solitude.

The meditations which these are calculated to promote, must be insipid when there is no responsive simplicity in the heart, to which they appeal; and nothing would appear so extraordinary in the sophistical and base character of Rousseau, as the passionate admiration he so eloquently portrays for the charms of nature, were it not that they addressed themselves to his imagination, and not his heart; and whereas the latter was mean and despicable in the extreme, and could extract no good out of any thing, the former was rich, beautiful, and poetical, and imparted attractions to every thing it approached. In the regulation of the mind, it seems to be most desirable to live *below* rather than *up* to the full extent of the spirits, and so

to arrange its necessary recreations, as to leave no cause for regret, when they are occasionally obliged to be dispensed with.

Every thing that goes beyond this, savours of danger ; but this is a truth which is commonly bought by painful experience, and before the mind is thoroughly acquainted with it, the freshness of its vigour is exhausted by the fearful conflicts it has had to maintain with the various hopes and fears which have been the only fruit of its too eager expectations of happiness ; and it brings to the decline of life the wisdom of unlearning most of the habits which the earlier part of it was passed in forming. Nothing appears so obvious, as that happiness consists in tranquillity. But how hard to learn this lesson ! how difficult for the young and ardent to conceive that repose can be otherwise than insipid, or that the pleasures which lie within the reach of every one should be at all worth pursuing. Yet it may be confidently prognosticated to these undisciplined votaries of enjoyment, that the pleasures they contemn, will be found even by themselves, to be the only genuine pleasures. This world is evi-

dently a place of probation ; it testifies itself to be such ; it manifests, by the ceaseless disappointment with which it meets the expectations of its followers, that it has no solid enjoyments to bestow. Yet it *has* enjoyments, and very exquisite and gratifying they are, though variable, fleeting, and stamped with the evanescence which distinguishes every thing earthly. But this instability which, when it characterizes the objects of strong affection, converts them into sources of distressing anguish, imparts rather a soothing and lovely impression to the feelings, which are awakened by a quick sensibility to the charms of nature. We behold them fade around us—we watch the fall of those “ sear and yellow leaves” whose infant shoots we had delighted to mark daily deepening into vernal beauty—we gradually miss our sweet songsters from the grove, disappearing with their little brood, whose growth and welfare gave us such a pleased interest : but we mark these changes with no sad or melancholy emotions—we know they will return. The God of seasons, in his unvarying counsels, brings his appointed times, and with his times

his silent, but most wise and sanctifying lessons. O! who so conversant with Him—who so united in divine and happy intercourse with God, as he who walks amidst the wonders of his Providence, acknowledging that

“ The Lord of all, himself through all diffus’d,
Sustains, and is the life of all that lives.”

And who feels that

“ Nature is but a name for an effect,
Whose cause is God.”

These are contemplations which charm, while they compose and elevate the mind. “ They produce joys which leave no sting behind !”

But what are these to the vitiated taste which indulgence has palled and satiated, and which has made “ weary life a pedlar’s pack that bows the bearer down.” Could we but see and *feel* that in this passing scene we *have* no resting place; that much *must* be sacrificed—much endured—and that our only chance of happiness is in not too earnestly desiring to be happy! and not too eagerly catching at every phantom that falsely bears

the name of happiness—could we but cultivate simplicity of view!—the single eye that looks to Jesus as its first of joys; the simple purpose to be pleased and thankful in the blessings he bestows—what but pure pleasures, such as angels might delight in, *could* spring from motives so unalloyed as these?

But it is observable, that even when the mind is not under the influence of such elevated principles, that the dictates of common sense point to pure and simple pleasures, as those best adapted to our condition. The happiest lot is always that which is the least marked by strong excitement; and we may lay it down as a general rule, that when our enjoyments are of a kind to agitate and rouse any important passion, or when they threaten such a result, they are no longer safe to be pursued. If then, (should we not do well to say to the rapid pursuers of enjoyment,) by the ardour of your feelings, or the waywardness of your imagination, you have been tempted to place your felicity in such occupations, or such objects, as too intensely engage your thoughts, let no temptation induce you to continue in

this delusion. Your part is undoubtedly a very difficult one; but if you would ever be acquainted with "the things that belong to your peace," you must not hesitate about adopting it. You must forsake your idolatries; your watchword must be "escape for your life"—escape to the still shades—escape to the calm occupations of sequestered nature—learn to love less—to think less of earth-born objects. Be still, and prepare for the horrors of *inaction*; you will find it perhaps almost overwhelming; for all that you can conceive of suffering, is faint in comparison with the desolation of heart which accompanies this *waiting* state of mind. *This* you must lay your account in; but take it as an act of retributive justice. You *would* not be warned—you *would* not be wise—you would rush forward to walk in the ways of your own heart, though assured that for this "God would bring you into judgment"—you *would* spurn the sweet and simple joys that courted your acceptance, to grasp the ashes of a deceived and deceiving world—then you *must* suffer. As well might you expect that you should take fire into your bosom and

not be burned, as that you should fail to reap the fruit of your own doings. But be calm—"your strength is to sit still"—be still then, and know that it is God who is dealing with you—he is weaning you from your idols—he is leading you to truth—and, "after that you have suffered awhile, he will strengthen, stablish, settle you."

Then will you awake to new views and new conceptions; "the time past of your life will suffice to have wrought the will of the Gentiles;" henceforth old things will have passed away, and all things will have become new. Nothing will be so new to you as the growing delight you will experience in things which were formerly tasteless and insipid beyond measure; nothing more surprising than the abhorrence with which, if you are sincere, you will contemplate much, and probably all, in which you once delighted. The flippant jest—the sarcastic sneer—the "foolish talking," that formerly might have constituted no inconsiderable portion of your ignoble pleasures, are now contemplated with disgust. The profaneness of a theatre—the midnight revel—the frothiness of unmeaning discourse with profit-

less companions, you consign, with a shudder, to forgetfulness. Your joys are now of another character; and fain, if it were possible, would you carry with you into the bosom of these tranquil joys, those with whom you once associated in habits of folly and of sin—those who “think it strange that you run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you.”

But you live not to them. You now know no man as your master—for one is your Master, even Christ. You will soon find how tender, and how kind a Master you serve.

You will soon perceive that his yoke is easy, and his burthen light. He makes the prisoners free, and sets at liberty those who were fast bound in misery and iron; for what iron so strong, what captivity so pitiable, as that which binds the soul in low attachments to unworthy and debasing pleasures! For when the weary round is run—and when the sated senses have exhausted all the stores of human splendour—the meanest flower that decks the field, has charms to shew, with which even Solomon in all his glory could not vie.

Love then simplicity—it is the basis of all truth. Let your recreations bespeak the tone and character of your mind ; let them be such as may be enjoyed without reproach, and resigned without regret ; and ever let them be of a kind, which are in no discordance with those pursuits which are to conduct you to Him, “ in whose presence alone there is fulness of joy, and at whose right hand there are pleasures for evermore.”

CHAPTER IX.

ON THE EXPEDIENCY OF A PREDOMINANT PRINCIPLE OF RELIGION IN THE FEMALE CHARACTER.

“Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised.” PROVERBS xxxi. 30.

It has been observed, that every person receives two educations, one from the instructions of others, and one from himself; and that the last is usually the most valuable.

It is painful indeed to remark, how generally inefficient is the first education for the various purposes of life, to which it is requisite to apply it. This may be, in some degree, attributable to the careless levity of youth, which renders it so averse to the contemplation of every thing that does not bear upon the face of it some

promise of gratification to the senses. But it may also be traced to the languid and ineffectual manner in which the instructors of youth are themselves but too prone to impart those moral and religious lessons, which alone can be deemed of essential importance, since it is from such lessons only, that valuable opinions can be introduced, and permanently fixed.

That there is a special necessity for possessing such opinions, nobody will dispute ; since every thinking person must have observed, that the course of a mind which is devoid of them, is almost always an irregular, if it escapes becoming a contemptible mind. Divested of opinions, it must, of necessity, be divested of any settled principles of conduct ; and be consequently subjected to perpetual vacillations, strong or weak, or slow or rapid, just as the individual temperament is indolent or active.

These varying impulses of an ill regulated mind, which will often find scope for exercise, in men, amidst the various occupations and amusements of active life, have but a very circumscribed sphere in the destiny of women. Restrained by the circumstances of their sex from

taking any very prominent part in the affairs of life, and from such pursuits as absorb and engross the mental powers, the capricious starts of fancy, which no steady rules have confined or subdued, are apt to become, in them, the prevailing features of character. A young man, unless gifted with the influence and power which extraordinary rank, or talent or fortune bestow, is usually taught by the mere course of events, some very important truths ; they are forced upon him whether he will or not ; and he, at least, learns this salutary lesson, that he occupies but a small place in the world, and that if it were less, few members of that world would know, and still fewer would care. This is not certainly a very elevating consideration, but it is a useful one ; for it forcibly suggests an idea of worldly insignificance, which may possibly lead to the best results ; but which, in every case, tends to lower the propensity to magnify the selfishness which is inherent in every heart, and which, we may confidently pronounce, to be at the root of every sin

But it is a consideration which is not often presented to the female mind. The courtesy

which the customs of society extend to women, though unquestionably right, and calculated to produce good, is, nevertheless, like every other human good, alloyed by evil. It tends to increase the blindness of the natural heart to its best interests, by nourishing the seeds of vanity and pride; and by attaching the idea of admiration to inferior objects, it encourages the cultivation of those objects to the neglect, if not the total abandonment, of others whose importance is incomparably greater.

Without decrying accomplishments, or considering it as a matter of no consideration whether a young lady possesses them or not, we may still ask, what are these when put in competition with the possession of moral and religious principles? They are the ornaments of the building, but the last are the building itself. They are at best but adventitious; seldom of *much* importance in advancing life; of none at all in the hour of death; and, after all, (speaking at least of genteel and pleasing manners) so much the instinctive result of good sense, and superior associates, that it is scarcely necessary to bestow much time in implanting

what will themselves spring up as the natural consequences of very simple causes.

It is far otherwise with religious principles. These, it is well known, require incessant labour, incessant practice to bring them to bear upon the individual's path through life; and with all the diligence and perseverance of the teacher, acting upon the utmost docility on the part of the pupil, still, so contrary are they to the strong current of human nature, that they are continually in danger of being overwhelmed and lost in its overpowering tide. This is a truth as well ascertained by experience in the moral, as any fact in the material, world. A person can hardly be found so senseless or so wicked as to deny that the passions require restraint; and in proportion as a man advances in the study of his species, he will be ready to affirm that they not only require restraint, but the very strongest restraint that can be laid upon them.

We would then ask, if the system of female education is adapted to this end? Surely so much the contrary, that one could almost suppose the daughters of a family were believed to

be divested of immortal souls, or that the interests of those souls were considered but of small moment, when placed in comparison with those of their frail and perishable bodies. To cultivate the latter, if not to the total exclusion of the former, at least to such an exclusion of them as plainly indicates the inferiority in which they are held, must be acknowledged as the prevailing plan of modern education; for while in most cases in fashionable life, children are overpowered and wearied with the various exertions they are required to make in the different branches of polite accomplishment, and are suffered to *slur* over their religious duties as mere matters of course, can it be otherwise than that they should grow up to consider these last as only formal acts to which they attach no other importance but that it is usual and decent to perform them?

Such is, upon the whole, rather a favourable view of the subject; we may turn from it to contemplate the common plan of transplanting British youth, in their earliest years, when the mind is most susceptible and most retentive of the impressions made upon the senses, to foreign

countries, where, for the advantage of being perfected in a language, or acquiring showy accomplishments at a cheaper rate, their eyes and ears (to speak in the most moderate terms) are to be familiarized with much that is subversive of that purity of thought which religion inculcates; and in the weekly profanation of the Sabbath, are exposed to the hazard of imbibing a habit of disregarding the duties of that sacred day. If it were upon no other account than this, a devout parent would surely recoil from placing his children in a scene where they *must* witness customs and manners the most repugnant to a well ordered and Christian mind. Well would he know how readily the bias of the heart inclines to evil.

“What,” he would say, “shall I convey my children, ‘the gift and heritage that cometh from the Lord,’ for whose immortal welfare I am in a great degree accountable, and with whom, I, one day, hope to present myself before God with the joyful exclamation, ‘here I am with those whom Thou hast given me!’ shall I carry them from the land of their nativity, the place in which their lot is cast, where they may

enjoy the privileges of a gospel ministry, a holy Sabbath, that period of spiritual refreshment which the Christian loves and longs for, and the example of those who walk with God in the still and silent duties of domestic life; shall I take them from this, their appointed place, to a land of spiritual darkness, to a people whose levity, whose vanity, whose utter carelessness of life and demeanour proclaim them to be amongst 'the nations who know not God;' shall I barter the virtuous discipline which is to train them for present peace and future glory, for the hollow acquisition of a personal grace? Their tongues must be silent in the grave; their bodies must return to the dust, but their immortal souls must live for ever, and live in that state for which my measures have been instrumental in preparing them. Then away with the suggestion that would prompt me to sacrifice my children, my dear and precious children, to the 'sounding brass and tinkling cymbal' of accomplishments. I believe—if I believe in revelation—that Christ died for those children—died that they might live with him for ever; and for his service, and for his glory they shall be fitted, as

far as human means may be permitted to contribute to so blessed an end ! ”

This will be the language of the believer ; it can be no other language : the man who believes what his Bible tells him can hold no other opinion. But what would the world say to such language and such opinions ? and not merely the world, not merely the scoffer at revelation, not merely the openly professed infidel, but the nominal Christian, the person who, by going to church, and attending to the external ordinances of religion, conceives that he does enough, and therefore does no more, what would he say to this parental solicitude ? He would say that it was cant ; he would call it the jargon of a sect, the rant of a tabernacle, and the dreams of an enthusiast.

But there may be some yet halting between opposite opinions ; some yet doubting if the present system of sacrificing so much time to the acquirement of accomplishments, and so little to the laying in a store of sound religious principles, be altogether a right system. To such persons then we would appeal ; such are the persons we would conjure to examine at-

tentively the whole course of their experience, and consider if it presents to them any single instance wherein religion has been passed over in education as an inferior concern, that such an instance has, in any degree, contributed to augment the list of virtuous, happy, or *justly* respectable characters—especially in the female sex.

Duty is commonly a severe thing. To women it comes in its most rugged form, and with its most rigid demands. The duties of men are of an active, those of women of a submissive kind; and beyond all comparison the latter are pre-eminent in difficulty and pain. There is something in bustle and stir and noise which supports itself. To *do* is generally far easier than to *suffer*; and is often sufficient to preserve an energetic mind from half the sorrow which accompanies the necessity of being still and motionless under trial. “To rock the cradle of declining age,” to bear in patience through the live long day, and perhaps the live long night, the querulousness of infirmity, or the vehemence of passion; to execute the tender offices of nurse and comforter, these are the difficulties—these are the

trials which more peculiarly fall to the female lot ; and they are trials whose acuteness is increased by the stillness and secrecy of their character. The strong love of approbation, implanted in most minds, stimulates and strengthens the exertions which fall under the observation of those around us ; but to wake and watch when no human eye is upon us ; to restrain the heart, the burthened heart, from breaking out into rebellion or despondency, to cheer the spirit, drooping perhaps under unkindness where it might have looked for gratitude ; to endure in silence and in solitude, requires a ruling principle within, which nothing but the highest and the most sedulous of instructions can assist in cultivating—a principle which towers above any that the mere varnish of a modern education has to give, as much as the summit of an Alpine mountain enveloped in the clouds of Heaven, exceeds the little hillock that the ant can raise.

There are doubtless very many cases in which rank and circumstances exempt a female from the drudgery of duty ; but where is the rank and where the situation in which tenderness

and affection, guided by the principles of Christianity, do not render the character of a female a chief source of domestic happiness? It is the woman who gives the first impulse to the disposition, and consequently to the future destiny of her children; and many eminently distinguished ornaments and pillars of the church, have traced their advantages, under Providence, to the early instructions of a pious mother. Where so much influence is deposited, how essential is it that its source should be pure, and that the mind from which it flows should, as much as possible, be kept unsullied from the pollutions of a misguided world; for as is the fountain, so will be the stream; the whole is made up of its parts; if the passions and affections are set upon frivolity, what but frivolity can be the result; and how is it possible that they should fail to be engrossed by trifles, when inferior things are suffered to engage nearly the whole attention, and nearly the whole time. If a girl perceives her personal accomplishment to be an object of such importance, that, in order to promote it, her parents are contented to exile themselves from their native

land, can she herself do otherwise than estimate it far beyond its real value? If she also perceives (and children have much quicker perceptions than their seniors suppose) that the disadvantages of witnessing an unhallowed Sabbath, if not of sharing in its irreverent sports, and the loss of beneficial religious instruction, are subjects not in the least cared for, on the part of her friends, can she herself avoid regarding them as trivial and unnecessary?

It is not enough to say that these things are attended to in their proper place, and that they excite a due proportion of regard. Their proper place is the first place, and their due proportion of regard is the highest and greatest proportion; and we would put it to the candour of any honest mind, if they are, and if they can be so respected by the parents and guardians of youth, who fly with their charge from a land, which, with all its faults, is still confessedly the seat of more female virtue and decorum (to say nothing of higher qualities) than any other part of Europe, to countries which are acknowledged to be the unmolested dwelling of unblushing vice; whose customs

licence the most disgusting freedom of language and of manner, and whose morals require only that actions be covered with exterior decency, and are then satisfied to connive at the most deep-rooted and heart-bred corruptions. Such is the testimony which almost all travellers bring home with them ; but to convince ourselves that it is not an exaggerated statement, we need but contemplate some of the histories and memoirs of those persons whose lives have been passed in foreign circles. We need but name those of Madame de Genlis as a tolerably correct specimen of “that deceivableness of unrighteousness” of which the Apostle speaks, and which in every case, as in that of Madame de Genlis, where religion is made a thing to be *prated* of as a matter of sentiment, and a theme for romance, instead of the sober, chastising, influential principle which regulates every other principle, will delude poor erring creatures into opinions and pursuits, whose worse than emptiness is not often detected till the evil is irremediable. It is, alas ! not often that the mistakes of education are discovered, till inveterate habits of self-indulgence, and unre-

strained will, render them almost irretrievable. It is painful indeed to remark, (as most reflecting minds must too often have had occasion to remark) how insufficient are all the powers of the most highly gifted mind to procure to its possessor any steady and lasting peace, when those powers are under the influence of such a predominant love for any worldly object as prevents their being exercised upon nobler subjects. "To have a right judgment in all things," is one of the prayers which our church directs us to offer at the throne of grace; and well are we so directed; but how can any mind be filled with a sincere desire to be blessed with that sublime wisdom which is from above, if it is biassed by an undue predilection for trivial and unsatisfactory pursuits? One misplaced and inordinate affection is quite sufficient to incapacitate and disorder all the mental powers. Mr. Cecilwell illustrates this in the following passage of his Remains.

"A perfectly just and sound mind," he says, "is a rare and invaluable gift. But it is still much more unusual to see such a mind unbiassed in all its actings. God has given this

soundness of mind but to few ; and a very small number of those few escape the bias of some predilection, perhaps habitually operating, and none are at all times, and perfectly, free. I once saw this subject forcibly illustrated. A watchmaker told me that a gentleman had put an exquisite watch into his hands, that went irregularly ; it was as perfect a piece of work as ever was made. He took it to pieces and put it together again twenty times. No manner of defect was to be discovered, and yet the watch went intolerably. At last it struck him, that possibly the balance wheel might have been near a magnet. On applying a needle to it, he found his suspicions true. Here was all the mischief—the steel-work in the other parts of the watch had a perpetual influence on its motions, and the watch went as well as possible with a new wheel. If the soundest mind be *magnetized* by any predilection, it must act irregularly *.”

It is perhaps the rarest thing to meet with any mind that some powerful influence does not

* Remains, p. 343.

occasionally attract from its proper centre of action. To resist and turn away from this influence forms a part of religious warfare the most laborious and the most difficult—but difficult though it be, it is not impossible. To the votary of pleasure, to the unhappy being whose strong and vigorous understanding and superior capabilities have been principally devoted to the polishing and improving of mere external qualities, whilst the weightier matters that related to eternity were overlooked and neglected, this discipline of the heart may seem indeed impossible, and probably unnecessary.

The course of such an education is well fitted to deaden or destroy the quick sensibilities that encompass the path of female destiny with more than common snares, since in the range of human beings there is scarcely to be found one more unsusceptible, both in heart and conscience, than the woman whose cultivated vanity, while it pants for admiration, has still a support from pride, which sustains it against the pressure of such mortifications as constitute the trials of the worldling. There are many veterans and warriors in the circles of dissipa-

tion and gaiety, and doubtless “ they have their reward.” They hold their place in society, they pass through life with apparent respectability—their earth-born pursuits are followed with such pleasures as they are calculated to impart, and they come to their end, where “ all their thoughts perish.” But sometimes the course of female education encounters a heart made for better things; an understanding that involuntarily rises above the superficial objects that are perpetually presented to it in the most magnified and unreal point of view. Like the fluttering dove escaped from the ark, it hovers over these grovelling trifles, seeking in them some stable resting-place, but seeking it in vain. Nothing which has not the stamp of perpetuity engraved upon it, *can* satisfy the longings of an immortal mind. Who is made happy by the acquisition of the most brilliant accomplishments, when those accomplishments are *all* that their possessor has to rest upon—or when they are the chief basis on which to repose? Few persons who are past the age of childhood, can have failed to experience something of the unsatisfactory nature of all merely

human advantages; and it is scarcely to be doubted that there are many even amongst the young, who are willing to believe that the portion which the world has to offer them is, very commonly, nothing but disappointment. The page of history—the tale of domestic life—it may be the experience of their own early wounded hearts, speak of nothing but the misfortune which waits upon placing strong confidence in any thing but God. This period of reflection, which occurs generally in the life of every individual who deserves to be classed amongst the rational and virtuous, is the season for acquiring that self-bestowed and superior education, which is justly considered the most serviceable and the most estimable. This is the time when truth begins to dawn upon the soul; when the heart, sickening at the trash on which so long it fed, demands reality—demands substantial food—and, asking for it earnestly, it will be satisfied. Yes; unhappy being, famished amidst the husks which feed the children of this world—arise, and go to your heavenly Father—in his house there is bread enough, and to spare. The bread he

gives, is indeed the bread of life, on which the soul thrives, and is prosperous. This is the food which nourishes and prepares it for the hard services of human life, those services which fall with most peculiar severity on the female sex. . Condemned by circumstances, to a warfare, of all others the most arduous and the most unceasing, a warfare with affections and feelings, which the tenderness of her nature would incline her to indulge, the mind of a young woman of genius and of feeling, requires the especial protection of the highest principles of duty. They are requisite to preserve her from the heartlessness which, from the necessity of establishing *some sort* of self-control, she would be liable to encourage on the one hand, and from the vagrant and disproportioned, if not disgraceful affections, which are the common result of an unrestrained imagination on the other. They are the prop and safeguard which shield her conduct from the breath of animadversion; they are the pure emanations of a superiority which is not of this world; they are the accomplishments of the heart, which the word and the work of God

alone can produce—accomplishments, whose sphere of action is not the concert or the ball-room, but which flourish in the bosom of retirement, which smooth the pillow of the sick and suffering, and spread a halo of glory round the bed of death.

CHAPTER X.

ON A COURSE OF RETRIBUTIVE JUSTICE.

“ Be not deceived : God is not mocked ; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.

“ For he that soweth to his flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption ; but he that soweth to the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.” GAL. vi. 7, 8.

IN calculations that rest upon matters of fact, we attain, step by step, to positive truth—in reasoning upon moral principles, the result cannot be so clearly demonstrated ; but to an attentive and thoughtful mind, it is nevertheless frequently quite as satisfactory ; for in the latter, as well as in the former subjects, a habit of exercising ourselves in the study of truth, enables us to trace the connexion between moral cause and effect with scarcely less certainty

than that which accompanies a mathematical process.

But the niceness of discrimination, the quickness of discernment, the clearness of judgment, which are requisite to assist an inquirer into truth, are qualities which the bounty of God alone can give, and the Spirit of God alone can improve. The man who would be an edified observer of what is passing around him, must bring to this important and most instructive study, a deep and practical acquaintance with Bible truth. Nothing else can furnish him with a key to the difficulties he will encounter; but possessed of that, he may proceed to unlock the stores of knowledge, in which the mass of human nature is so rich.

Scarcely any passage from Scripture will offer a better method of acquiring the lesson which our subject would inculcate, that there is even in this world a course of retributive justice, than the verses which form the motto of this chapter.

Let us, then, for a short interval give them our serious meditation. The words are few and simple; but, if they mean any thing, they

must mean a great deal. "Be not deceived; God is not mocked—what a man soweth that shall he also reap."

It is very certain that we are always sowing, always planting for futurity. There scarcely lives the human being that is capable of action, who is not making provision for some enjoyment beyond the present hour. It is one of the laws of our nature to be casting a forward glance upon some desired object, and to be using such exertions to obtain that object, as the Apostle well illustrates and defines by the terms "sowing to the flesh," and "sowing to the Spirit." To each of these he annexes their reward. "Those," he says, "who sow to the flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption." Without just now dwelling upon those more immediate works of the flesh of which a fearful catalogue is given in Scripture, and which occupy the time and thoughts of the daring sinner, let us consider those of a less openly profane character, which, ending in corruption, are still to be classed amongst the works of the flesh. Let us consider the case of a man whose besetting sin is the love of money, but

who, nevertheless, is a believer in revelation. Ask him generally, if he agree with St. Paul in his declaration, that those who sow to the flesh shall reap corruption, and he will grant a ready assent, and perhaps go into a strain of the most edifying comments upon it; but apply the matter to himself—tell him that by an ardent and unchastized pursuit of money *he* is sowing to the flesh, and he will differ both from you and St. Paul—he will attempt to show that his practice is *not* adverse to this doctrine—he will proceed to convince you—of what? why, simply of this; that when the whole of his arguments are reduced to their obvious meaning, they only testify that he has no influential belief in this scriptural precept; that in considering the Apostle's advice as a mere general maxim, which he may apply in any way, or no way, just as it happens to suit him, he does not believe that he is deceived, or God is mocked. That he conceives he may sow what he likes, and he shall still reap the desired harvest—that while he imagines “*flesh*” and “*spirit*” to be words without any precise meaning, he has the most clear and definite appre-

hension of the properties of gold—that he values it—he desires it—and, as far as human means permit, he *will* obtain it.

There might have been a time, perhaps, when he would have maintained his opinions with more hesitation and distrust. In the commencement of his chase after wealth, such commands as these, to be true and just in all his dealings, to do as he would have others do to him; to give to him that asked of him, and from him that would borrow not to turn away; to believe that the love of money was the root of all evil; such injunctions, we say, being those which his Bible laid upon him, might formerly present some obstacles to his pursuit; but time and habit have performed their usual work. The sordid practice has become so familiar, so blended with the passion, and the passion itself so much a part of his existence, that, as to this sin, the man is spiritually blind; his “conscience is seared as with a red-hot iron;” his moral vision is totally gone; and he can no more, upon this point, be said to be able to discriminate right from wrong, than a person who is born blind could distinguish colours. It

is the same as to every other prevailing sin. The understanding, enslaved by its predominant and indulged inclination, is compelled by the passions to reserve a *saving clause* for that particular propensity, whatever it may be; and thus, though urged by that cherished vice, to be perpetually defying the express declaration of the living God, who proclaims that the fruit of the flesh is corruption, the deluded offender continues to sow the seeds of those fruits, expecting to reap any thing, and every thing, but the harvest which is promised him. Infidelity is not confined to the disbelievers in revelation—men are infidels as to every thing which opposes their passions; upon this subject they refuse assent even to the evidence of their senses; for the whole state of the world confirms the awful truth, that “God is not mocked, and that what a man sows he actually *does* reap”—the history of every individual confirms it: the course of every person’s life, who has passed the meridian of his days, would bear testimony to the silent, and perhaps unmarked, but most sure and unerring justice of the Deity. No truth is more obvious, than that

we are always gathering the fruits which we have planted ; but no truth is more overlooked or more disregarded. Few persons seem either to know or to care what seeds they are casting into the ground, not considering that not a day, not an hour, but those seeds are ripening for life or death, for happiness or misery. Some appear to be vegetating in indolent inactivity ; others, blest by the Giver of all Good, with sweet dispositions and amiable tempers, enjoy their allotted comforts, and slide over their allotted sorrows, with an inobservance which their natural inclination to be happy enforces, and which it is so easy to mistake for the effects of Christianity. But inactive as these persons seem, they are still *insensibly* planting for futurity, and they have their reward, which, in the dealings of Providence, is always strictly analogous to the invisible *motive*, not the apparent *action*.

To live at peace with all their fellow-creatures—to enjoy their society—to make no trouble, and to take as little as they possibly can, being the objects to which, by the influence of natural temperament, they are directed, they

succeed in securing them. They are usually loved in youth and age—they live unmolested, and die regretted—and are generally amongst the instances which the world produces as “*doing honour to religion*,” when, in justice to the departed, they might be cited as examples of doing equal honour to many things which religion opposes. However, “the world will love its own”—such persons reap what they have sowed—“verily, they have their reward.”

There is also the philosopher, the moralist, who sows with care the seeds of such fruits as he most values. The words flesh and spirit, and corruption and everlasting life, he makes no great account of. St. Paul he is apt to consider as a vehement declaimer, not much to be depended upon ; but, on the whole, the precept which we are now considering, he, in a *qualified* measure, agrees with. He cannot fail to have remarked, that to be respectable and secure, and distinguished and thriving, he must be honest, and self-denying, and diligent, and kind. Virtue is the tool with which he is to work for happiness ; he therefore puts the curb upon such propensities as would interfere with

his purpose, and thus *he* sows for the future. He reaps the respect and good-will, and honour of the world, and in that enjoyment of health, and ease, and fortune, and comfort, which waits upon a subjugated will, and resisted passions, he also “has *his* reward.” But it is to be feared that there are many whom the world accounts amongst its excellent and lovely, who are still to be numbered with those who only sow to the flesh. Wherever “*faith*, which worketh by love,” has no influence in directing the labours of the husbandman ; wherever *He* is not known, “whom to know is life eternal ;” wherever “despite is done to the Spirit of Grace,” can we as *rational* beings, indulge any just expectation of reaping that everlasting life, which is expressly declared to be the result of sowing to the Spirit ?

But the misfortune is, that scarcely any persons will take the trouble to *reflect* on these things. The labour of thinking to any useful purpose is too intense, and often too painful, to be voluntarily undertaken ; and we are well contented (certainly in our own instance, if not in that of others,) to take it for granted, that if

we do as much good, and as little harm as possible, all is going on well within us ; according to the maxim of the Poet,

“ He can't be wrong, whose life is in the right.”

The temptations of “ the God of this world,” conspire to lull this fatal security, and to blind our eyes, especially on small occasions, to the dangers that surround us. Every human being has some besetting sin—some weak side that requires to be especially guarded ; and every natural heart, as we have before remarked in the lover of money, has some exemption to claim for that peculiar infirmity. “ I cannot help my temper,” says the passionate man ; “ it is my misfortune.” “ I cannot help the strength of my passions,” says the votary of licentious pleasure. We do not, perhaps, so openly hear the complaint, “ I cannot be strictly honest, because I want to be rich :” or, “ I cannot speak the truth, because I have an inclination to deceive, whenever deceit would serve my turn”—but we behold it practically illustrated every day.

Yet, in vain shall you tell such persons, that

by indulging their evil propensities, they are preparing punishment, and may expect it, as surely as the labourer the harvest he has sown. Assure them that God has decreed that it *must* be so. Illustrate what you say, as you too surely may by examples. Shew the passionate, the irritable, the selfish, the unamiable, some kindred spirit now reaping, in his neglected, and forsaken, and dishonoured age, the fruits he has planted. Bid the bold libertine look at his prototype—haggard—and needy—and disreputable—and despised. Tell the sordid lover of money to behold the miser's end; a dying miser with an awakened conscience! Where is his treasure now?—the end is come—and what does *he* reap? Is it lamenting friends, and loving children—a grave much honoured with their tears—a memory endeared and venerated? No—it is death abhorred and shrunk from by himself—greeted with pleasure, as his portion, by those, who scarcely watch the earth cast over him, ere they riot in the stores he gave his soul to accumulate. Tell the deceiver and the violater of truth, that his crooked courses *must* be discovered, and that he is

sowing the seeds of shame and remorse. Call his attention to the lot of those whose branded names have sealed their punishment. They were, perhaps, long triumphant—long secure and masked—and hugged themselves in conscious safety—and laughed at justice as an empty name. But nothing is hid that shall not be known—and their iniquity at length stands disclosed to view—and most manifestly, most awfully—is God at last found true. You may tell all this—you may prove it even to a demonstration—but you prove in vain, till He to whom the power, and the wisdom, and the excellency belongs, manifests himself as he does not unto the world, and shews the believer what are the purposes of his providence. Then the enlightened mind acquaints itself with God, and is at peace.

It sees, indeed, the agency of second causes perpetually at work; but sees them moved by that unerring Intelligence, which imparts order and meaning, where all before was confusion and mystery.

It is the privilege of the Christian, and of him only, to have a right judgment in all

things. He views in this disordered world the ripening purposes of Sovereign Power. Where others are continually deceived and deceiving, "ever learning but never able to come to the knowledge of the truth," because they seek it not at the living fountain; he receives the word "into an honest and good heart, and brings forth fruit an hundred fold." Ever in the habit of tracing out the operations of Providence, the history of himself and of all connected with him, presents a page of never-ceasing interest. Continually occupied in connecting effects with their causes, he seldom errs in placing to their proper account, the visitations of his Heavenly Master. He is not deceived; he *knows* that "God is not mocked." "For that sin, I endured that punishment," is the acknowledgment of his penitential heart, wrung with a sense of God's justice in his dealings with his creatures.

With whatever sacrifice—whatever suffering, the inflexible course of justice may, in this world, enforce retribution, it is most consolatory to know, that it is never too late to plant for a blissful eternity. Whilst the multiplied

griefs of self-procured suffering, perpetually remind us how woefully and how completely one part of this prophetic Scripture is fulfilling, we surely cannot reasonably doubt the equal accomplishment of the other. We know in many cases, for we witness, how surely the indulgence of sensual pursuits brings with it its own punishment; and in the innumerable instances, which tempt the perplexed believer to say like David, when he sees the prosperity of the wicked, that "they are not in trouble as other men, neither are they plagued like other men;" yet taught by that Spirit of truth, which guides into all truth, he soon also, like the Psalmist, exclaims, "When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me;

"Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end,

"Surely thou didst set them in slippery places; thou castedst them down into destruction.

"How are they brought into desolation, as in a moment! they are utterly consumed with terrors.

"As a dream when one awaketh; so, O

Lord, when thou awakest, thou shalt despise their image."

If, then, the sinner gather his allotted fruits, as we have constant proof confirming the word of God that he does, need we doubt the rich harvest of the expecting saint? It is promised him in many an encouraging portion of the Sacred Volume; and he meekly waits for it. Amidst the conflict of protracted hope, and painful suffering, he possesses his soul in patience.

The decisive hour must come—the hour of justice—he has seen it come in every instance that met his observation. No calculation of numbers is more certain to his senses, than the Apostle's declaration, that "what a man sows that shall he also reap." He, perhaps, has sown the seeds of his immortal fruit in bitterness and tears—amidst the struggle of contending passions—the pangs of bodily affliction—the yet worse pangs of mental agony—the subjugation of the will—and the daily crucifixion of rebellious nature. This he has done—and this he does—again, and yet again—and still it is to do. But does he faint—

or doubt his recompence?—O no—he is too well skilled in the ways of Providence, to distrust their undeviating course. He beholds, by the eye of faith, the fields already white unto the harvest—and though, for a time, denied the fruition of his hopes, and doomed for the present, to go on his way weeping, he believes that “he shall doubtless come again bearing precious seed, and bringing his sheaves with him.”

CHAPTER XI.

ON HOLINESS.

“Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness.”—2 PET. iii. 11.

It is not uncommon to hear persons support their arguments against the peculiar sanctity which the Christian doctrines enforce, by alleging that they were addressed to those, and to those alone, who existed at the period when they were first promulgated. The state both of the Jewish and Gentile world, was, at that time, they say, deplorable. The former had lost all traces of the spirituality of their religion, and merely adhered to its forms; the latter was sunk in the grossest idolatry. They accordingly maintain that it was against this state of abomination, that the strong language occasionally used by the Saviour and his Apos-

ties, respecting a renewed and converted heart, was principally, if not exclusively, addressed.

But this is a species of argument which is not supported by fact. The state of the world, at the coming of our Lord, doubtless was deplorable, and called for the most energetic and awful reproof; but when we consider its condition at the present day, under the full blaze of Gospel illumination, can we admit it to be any otherwise improved, than as Christianity itself has contributed to improve it? But the restraints which religion imposes, and the advantages which spring from those restraints, are so gradual and silent, that their claim upon our gratitude is very indistinctly perceived, and very inadequately acknowledged.

There are not many persons who have the inclination to indulge in speculative habits; and still fewer who would wish to pursue any chain of thought which had a tendency to reproof or correction; it is therefore to be expected that whilst the outward sign of evil no longer exists, they should be easily satisfied that the evil itself is gone. The altars of the heathen they perceive are overturned; and as Jupiter and

Juno have no longer their worshippers, it would be difficult to persuade them there was any idolatry left, or that he whom the Scriptures recognize as the god of this world, had any followers. While churches and chapels are daily opened for public worship, they do not inquire if they are filled—or if filled, whether the service of the sanctuary be the service of the heart and of the soul. But, we would ask, does the mere *attendance* there, enforce a changed and a renewed spirit? On the contrary, should we be too severe, in believing that many persons return from the service of a Christian church, as little edified, in so far as relates to any effectual and radical alteration of heart and life, as if they had been assisting at the sacrifices of a heathen deity?

It is the motive which sanctifies the deed; and not the outward action, but the inward state of the heart before God, is the principal point. That human actions are generally far better now than they were, in the days of the Apostles, is readily admitted. Whilst the pure and dazzling radiance of Christian truth emits its glorious beams, many evil deeds *must* shroud

their guilt in secrecy, which would otherwise stalk unshamed and unreprieved in open day; and this is no very inferior advantage, amongst the many which Christianity has been the means of bestowing upon mankind. But it is an advantage which, in so far as it only affects the external conduct, can obviously have no reference to that renewal of heart which is comprised in the term *holiness*; a characteristic which all experience and observation, in unison with the testimony of Scripture, denies to man in his natural and unconverted state. That in that state, he possesses many moral and amiable qualities, is not to be disputed; and that, in the due exercise of his social and relative duties towards his fellow creatures, he is frequently the proper object of human praise and love, is also allowed. But that in the exercise of his duties to God, which reasonably demand his devoted love, his devoted submission, and that full surrender of his will to the will of his Maker, which inspires a delight, a joy, a complete satisfaction in the fulfilment of these duties—that in these exercises, he is freely, fully, and complacently oc-

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cupied, few persons, if any, will venture to affirm. Might it not be asserted, on the contrary, that they are naturally irksome, wearisome, and burdensome to him in the extreme; and that, rather than submit to them, he will exhaust himself in trying to discover, or to invent reasons against wearing the yoke of a servitude so repugnant and so distasteful to him? Few things more clearly testify this, than the ingenuity with which the most moral and virtuous of persons still contrive to dispute the necessity for that *spirituality* which religion enjoins. They will go a certain length, and a very laudable length, in the exercise of its duties. They have imbibed a certain portion of truth. The spray from its celestial fountain has fallen upon, and refreshed them; but having failed to drink of the living stream, they want the increase in divine strength which, neither he that planteth, nor he that watereth, but God alone can give. They are perhaps charitable in the largest and most lovely sense of the word; not only in bestowing their money (often the most easily bestowed of any thing) but their time, their talents, to the service of their poorer

brethren ; and round their oppressed equals throwing continually a shield of tenderness to guard their errors from the discussion, and still more from the attacks of the slanderer. Constant and attentive in the service of the sanctuary and of the closet, “ yet one thing they lack ;” it is that vital principle of holiness which is the very breath and being of the Divine life ; and which, not possessing, they cannot comprehend ; and not comprehending, they cannot believe to exist. In all the practical duties of religion they are so exemplary, that many a devout Christian in beholding them is tempted to exclaim “ ye are not far from the kingdom of God.” But speak to them “ of the love of God shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost ;” of the life which the Christian lives in the flesh, being what St. Paul describes (Gal. ii. 20.) “ I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live : yet not I, but Christ liveth in me ; and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me ;” and you will find by a passive smile, and a shake of the head, either at your melancholy delusion, or that of St. Paul,

or by a declaration that "these are mysteries with which we have nothing to do," that their faith is bounded within a circumscribed sphere, and extends not to their experiencing any of that sweet and heavenly communion which the spiritual mind delights to hold "with Him, whom, having not seen, it loves;" nay worse than this, that they are just as much inclined to treat with contempt the capability of that divine communion, and that spiritual love as the most openly professing disciples of infidelity. They do not, indeed, with irreverent and indiscreet levity, deride the doctrines which they confess they do not understand; but the ingenious sophistry with which they will endeavour to reduce their force, or explain it away, or, in short, do any thing but admit the possibility of their being made applicable to man's present condition, too clearly testifies that with them "the offence of the cross has not yet ceased;" and that, to all intents and purposes, as far as relate to that regeneration of heart which our blessed Lord, in his discourse with Nicodemus, treats of as indispensable, they are yet absolutely dead.

Scarcely any case seems to demand more

compassion and tenderness of treatment than the case of such persons ; and none would the real believer more affectionately address. He would intreat them to look round the world. " You admit its degraded state," would he say ; " you admit that it is difficult and adverse to the will to pursue a religious course ; that the heart does not entirely love its Creator as it should do ; and that, without doubt, man is very much fallen in his nature. You admit, that to assert he could ever so come from the hand of a pure and holy God, would be to make *him* the *author* of the evil, he only for wise, though mysterious purposes, permits. You admit that he sent his Son into the world to suffer and to die, in order that he might remedy this evil. Can then the evil be a slight one which called for such a remedy as this ? Is it sufficient to say that we are only *very much* fallen from our original state ; are we not *wholly* and *entirely* fallen in respect to our relation with the God who made us ? That, from the highest to the lowest operations of nature, the means are fitted to the end, in the simplest and most beautiful manner, is a fact, which observation amply tes-

tifies; and shall the Author of nature, in the most stupendous of his works, the mighty work of human redemption, that work "which angels desire to look into," shall he here be supposed to desert the constancy and wisdom of his operations, and employ the most awful and important means to compass a comparatively trifling and unimportant end? It is surely impossible to dwell for an instant upon a supposition so extravagant, without disclaiming all belief in the Scripture character of God, and of his Son, and of the work of human redemption altogether. But so far from this, you profess the most absolute faith in revelation; you do not attempt or wish to qualify your assent to its peculiar doctrines; you deny that you are an atheist, or a deist, or a Socinian, or any thing but a believer in Jesus Christ, as "God manifest in the flesh." Whence then your resistance to some of the most distinguishing characteristics of the religion you profess? Perhaps you reply that you do not resist them. Yet I produce as its peculiar and distinguishing characteristics, faith in the Saviour operating so actively in the life, as to constrain the convert to exclaim with

St. Paul, "the life that I live in th flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God : " love to the Saviour, bringing home to the heart an experimental conviction of that "acceptance in the beloved" of which also the Apostle speaks ; joy in the Saviour, which prompts a delightful sympathy in the devout confidence of St. Paul, " *I know* in whom I have believed ; " a continued sense of the Spirit's influence on the soul, which realizes the prophet's assurance, "and ye shall hear a voice within you saying, this is the way, walk ye in it ; " a habit of turning to this gracious and holy guest, for guidance and for strength, and, above all things, for that sanctification of heart and life which is the evidence of his presence, and of his renovating power ; — I speak of these things, and I am told that, although they are to be found in the Bible, we have nothing to do with them ; they were addressed to other persons, or they mean something different to what they express ; or, let them mean what they will, we can never understand them.

It is painful enough to hear this language from the idle, the thoughtless, the infidel, and the

profane ; but from you, so calculated to do honour to your Master's cause, it is doubly painful : but, alas ! whichever way we turn our eyes, the Apostle's remark is sorrowfully verified, that " the carnal mind is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be."

The whole disordered condition of the world evinces it to be in a state of the most awful anarchy and rebellion against its Creator. It "groans and travails in pain." This is the fundamental truth on which every other religious truth depends. It is in vain to qualify it ; it is in vain to plead some extenuation of man's guilt ; it is in vain to speak of righteous works and virtuous feelings, and tender sympathies, while love to God is wanting, while gratitude to God is wanting—gratitude for the gift of a Saviour—humble adoration—trusting faith—simple obedience—the single eye that looks to Jesus as the author and finisher of faith ! Where, where is all this ? You tell me no where—there is no such thing. But do not think because *you* feel it not, that it has no existence. That love to God is required of us as a duty, and the first of duties,

cannot be denied without denying the truth of the Scriptures from beginning to end; and to say that the Almighty would demand what he had denied us the means of rendering to him, would surely be as unreasonable as it would be irreligious. That the power to know and to love God must be given by God, we readily allow; perhaps you never may have sought it at the throne of grace. But others have; and as surely as there lives in heaven a prayer-hearing God, their supplications have been crowned with full fruition. The love of God is the Holy Spirit's work in the soul; and it is granted to the prayers of those who earnestly seek the Spirit's influence. "If ye then being evil know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall my heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask it?"

It is under this sanctifying process, that the character advances to holiness, dies daily to the world, and becomes more and more fit for heaven. The whole aim and object of such a character is God. To love him more, and serve him better, is its single purpose. The renewed heart is the temple of the Holy Spirit, and as such a temple does its possessor venerate

and respect it. Would he introduce into that temple aught that could contaminate it? No; his whole life is an avowed warfare with sin, his deadly and unsparing foe; that he must yet be subject to its attacks, though delivered from its hateful dominion, is, to the end of life, his bitterest source of sorrow.

When shall I die to vanity, pain, death,
When shall I die—when shall I live for ever?

is his constant theme.

Yet, after all, perhaps you will say, this is very loose and indefinite; the state of which you speak, may arise from the ebullitions of constitutional temperament, not from any fixed and steady principles. But this we deny. We deny that it *can* arise from mere starts of feeling; or that it is evanescent; or that it is natural; or that it is, to human power, practicable; “for the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.” But when once the first principles of the Christian faith *are* spiritually discerned, there is a new life begun in the soul; it is born

again of God, and shall never die, “but has its fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life.” One of the first fruits of holiness is liberty. “If the Son make you free, then are you free indeed.” The thralldom of the passions, the tyranny of the will, the perversity of the affections, those fetters whose iron entereth into the soul, the holy man is perfectly delivered from. They may rage, but they can never reign over that heart which is filled with the “faith that worketh by love.” No other principle effectually displaces their dominion, and reduces them to their inferior and proper sphere, and renders their subjugation a pleasing and acceptable sacrifice to the Lord.

Many principles may suffice to prompt resistance to their power; but, as we have before observed, *motive* is every thing in the sight of God. To what purpose then (except indeed for a temporal interest) can a round of lifeless duties be pursued, if the service is not one of love? “To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me?” saith the Lord.

“Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and

sabbaths, the calling of assemblies I cannot away with ; it is iniquity, even the solemn assembly. And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you ; yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear *."

Love to God is the essence of holiness, the main-spring of religious duty, the fire that alone descends upon the altar, kindles the sacrifice, and causes it to ascend with a sweet smelling savour up to heaven. It is holiness which not only delivers the fettered will from its earthly chains, but influences it to delight in the things to which it is naturally so averse. The thick and heavy veil of sense no longer on the heart, it is released from the confused and distorted views in which the temptations of the world, in unison with those of the great enemy, had presented every object to its notice. It is enabled not only to pursue as desirable, but to love as beautiful, the truths of religion ; it is empowered not merely to assent to them with cold approbation, but to choose them as its portion with thankfulness and joy. It has a view of truth, which

* Isaiah i. 11. 13. 15.

the spirit of truth alone can give ; it stands as it were, upon an eminence, and looks down upon the world, and upon its own former ways, with a new sense. It beholds not the danger so much as the loathsomeness of sin—not the frivolity, but the madness of the generality of thinking beings—not their inattention, and want of love, but their state of total rebellion towards God. Nor is it with any sentiments of Pharisaical pride that a converted person thus contemplates a “ whole world lying in wickedness ;” but, as himself, a brand snatched from the burning—as himself, saved only by the grace of Him, “ who giveth no account of his matters”—as himself, one who, but for that grace, must have augmented the number of those “ who like not to retain God in their knowledge ; his spirit melts with compassion for his unhappy fellow-creatures ; and, while he implores that God would continue to him the faith by which alone he himself stands, his heart’s desire and prayer for his brethren is, like that of the Apostle’s for Israel, “ that they may be saved.” But you will here, perhaps, if you admit the possibility of such a state of

heavenly-mindedness, still object, that to the greater part of the world it is impracticable; for, that the duties and engagements of everyday life would totally preclude the attainment of a temper of mind so wholly opposed to them. It is granted that, comparatively, but few persons have leisure for the cultivation of a high state of spirituality; but there is ample ground in Scripture for the encouragement of the lowest and feeblest of the true servants of God. The parable of the talents alone suffices to prove to us, that God is not a hard Master, "requiring much where much has not been given." Blessed indeed are those to whom the largest portion of time, and talent, and opportunity has been granted here, to prepare for his better service hereafter. Highly favoured they must consider themselves above their fellows; not from any presumptuous and unfounded supposition that their future state of bliss will be in any degree higher than that of others; but because their present happiness is greater. God gives them time, and ability, and inclination for the noblest, the purest, the best of pleasures—the constant

pursuit of what is pleasing to Him—and justly do they esteem themselves blessed that “the lot has fallen to them in so fair a ground.”

But do those who are less favoured with these rich opportunities, employ such as *are* granted them with diligence and faithfulness? We are told that “to him which hath, shall be given, and from him which hath not, shall be taken away that which he seemeth to have.”

None are so busy as to have no hour, no half hour, no ten, or five minutes in the day, to give to Him who gives them every thing. Do they lament to find themselves so straitened in His service? Do they seize with thankfulness each precious interval that offers for religious improvement? Do they lift the heart in mental prayer, when the restraints of society and occupation deny the outward exercise of language? Alas! why should we prosecute so hopeless, so painful an inquiry! The difficulties which occupation, and the necessary pursuits of life, place in the way of a religious course, are as feathers in the scale, mere atoms—mere mockery to name as difficulties, compared with that “leaden cloak of infidelity”

which wraps up the affections in such selfishness, and sin, and sensuality, as makes the emancipation of the spirit it encloses, a miracle, which nothing but the supernatural work of God's grace can possibly effectuate. And how often does that grace solicit entrance in the poor deluded heart, but solicit it in vain ! How often with the most profligate and abandoned, must " the still small voice " have pleaded ! What thoughts—what profitable thoughts must have been quenched in the minds of thousands and of millions !

Witness the crowds that gaze upon the execution of a criminal ! Watch their appalled and horror-stricken faces ! See the great God of truth now working by his Spirit on their guilty souls ! The fruit of sin is visibly before them—they tremble and are still. The voice within speaks solemnly ! " why will ye die ? " it seems to say. *Almost* they think of prayer—of penitence—but another voice too often heard—too often listened to—the false-deluding voice—the liar and the murderer's voice deceives them still—" ye shall not die—ye shall not surely die !" lulls them to fatal peace,

and binds them once again, his willing, self-devoted victims.

To be turned then, from the power of darkness unto light, and from the service of this deceiver, who, though in a different degree, yet in the same manner would enslave every living soul—to be translated into “the glorious liberty of the children of God,” is the gradual work of a sanctifying process carried on by the Holy Spirit of God, in the heart of every truly converted character. That this transformation is essential to salvation, we read in almost every part of Scripture.

“Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

“Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.

“Marvel not that I said unto thee, ye must be born again*.”

“If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.

* John iii. 3. 5. 7.

“ Be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind *.

“ And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins. †”

That it is given to prayer, we are also thus assured :

“ If ye then being evil know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him ‡ ?

“ If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it.

“ And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever.

“ Even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him, but ye know him, for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you §.”

We cannot therefore better conclude the consideration of this subject, than with the pious supplications of good Archbishop Leighton :—

* Rom. xii. 2.

† Ephes. ii. 1.

‡ Luke xi. 13.

§ John. xiv 14. 16, 17.

“O invisible God, who seest all things ; eternal Light ! before whom all darkness is light, and in comparison with whom every other light is but darkness ; the weak eyes of our understanding cannot bear the open and full rays of thine inaccessible light ; and yet without some glimpses of that light from heaven, we can never direct our steps, nor proceed towards that country which is the habitation of light. May it therefore please Thee, O Father of lights, to send forth thy light and thy truth, that they may lead us directly to thy holy mountain. Thou art good and the fountain of goodness ; give us understanding, that we may keep thy precepts. That part of our past lives which we have lost in pursuing shadows, is enough, and indeed too much ; bring back our souls into the path of life, and let the wonderful sweetness thereof, which far exceeds all the pleasures of this earth, powerfully yet pleasantly preserve us from being drawn aside therefrom by any temptation from sin or the world. Purify, we pray thee, our souls from all impure imaginations, that thy most beautiful and holy image may be again renewed within

us, and by contemplating thy glorious perfections, we may feel daily improved within us that divine similitude, the perfection whereof, we hope, will at last make us for ever happy in that full and beatific vision we aspire after. Till this most blessed day break, and the shadows fly away, let thy Spirit be continually with us, and may we feel the powerful effects of his divine grace, constantly directing and supporting our steps, that all our endeavours throughout the whole remaining part of our lives, may serve to promote the honour of thy blessed name, through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*"

CHAPTER XII.

ON SUFFERING AND DEATH.

“ These are they which came out of great tribulation.”

REV. vii. 14.

THE dim and imperfect view which our limited capacities compel us to take of most subjects, and our strong resistance to whatever thwarts and opposes our vehement desire of happiness, combine to render suffering of any kind totally abhorrent to our nature.

At the same time that this intense and insatiable thirst for enjoyment, forcibly, we may almost say demonstrates that there is a future state for its fruition, it forms, by the disappointment which commonly accompanies it, the source of perpetual and profitable, though painful discipline. We require a very powerful monitor to wean us from vanity : none is so effectual as

suffering, without whose practical lessons the precepts of the sublimest morality would, it is to be feared, prove unsalutary and uninfluential.

The tender ties of nature, the exercise of the sweet affections they excite, the contemplation of the ever new and ever lovely works of creation—the enjoyment of health, and strength, and intellect, and all the precious gifts of a bountiful God, are so truly valuable, and so justly dear, that in the most resigned and sanctified mind, there could scarcely be expected to exist any very ardent aspirations after a higher and more satisfactory state of existence than this, in which it is permitted to luxuriate in such pure pleasures—pleasures that may be truly numbered amongst those “which are given us richly to enjoy”—were there not mingled with these exquisite enjoyments, such a portion of alloy, as indicates that here we have “no continuing city,” and admonishes us to “seek one to come.”

But it is not only as a teacher for futurity, that affliction ever and anon summons us to her severe, but excellent school ; it is also for

our present advantage that she appears ; and there are few of us to whom she does not, in this respect, prove inestimable. Even the man whose limited observation and obdurate heart preclude him from extending the effects of her instructions to their ultimate and noble end, is still sometimes improved by them, to a degree, and in a manner in which no other species of instruction would have improved him. The suffering man (unless he be totally abandoned to a reprobate mind) is likely to be the better man for his sufferings. We do not say that he will be the more religious man, for that is by no means a necessary, though it may, and often does prove, an attendant consequence upon his case. But he is thus far likely to be a better man, that he is brought to think—he is practically taught that he is a dependant being ; that whatever his advantages, he is as poor and as powerless to command his own happiness, as the meanest creature that exists ; and that, be his confidence in the course of events what it may, the most unexpected, and perhaps, apparently the most trivial cause, which he could neither foresee nor prevent, is

sufficient to dash his hopes for ever to the ground.

He must also be a thoroughly hardened and inveterate sinner, if his heart as well as his understanding is not improved. A state of uninterrupted felicity is a dangerous state ; and we are well admonished by the prayers of our simple and beautiful Litany, “ in all time of our wealth ” to intreat for Divine mercy. The sins of selfishness are apt to flourish to excess in the hot-bed of happiness. We want the stimulus of personal suffering to excite our sympathy in the distresses of others, and to rouse that love to our unhappy brethren, which the compassionate Lord of all pronounced to be the test of his followers—“ By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one toward another.” Mr. Cecil justly observes, that “ tenderness and sympathy are not enough cultivated by any of us. No one is kind enough—gentle enough—forbearing and forgiving enough. We find throughout our Lord’s history, the strongest traits of compassion.”

No state can be considered so unfavourable

to the promotion of this part of the Christian character, as unbroken happiness. Happiness has no willing communion with one uneasy feeling—it is too triumphant—too busy, to pause and give indulgence to the melancholy train of reflections which are prompted by sights of sorrow. Occupied by the present, and careless for the future, its only solicitude is to maintain and guard the precious interests that dwell within the narrow confines of *self*. Doubtless, there will be variations as to the manner in which a state of happiness operates upon different individuals. In a generous mind it will urge to generous deeds; in a pious one to gratitude; and in the most sordid and unprincipled, perhaps, to random fits of kindness to others; just as a child under the influence of bribery, is led to do what is desirable;—but the better fruits of virtue, self-denial, self-control, compassion, and love, are not commonly the growth of this soil; they strike their roots in the seemingly sterile, but most rich and thriving ground of adversity. There is no levity of character—no habit of inconsideration—no obdu-

racy of feeling, but must be more or less affected by suffering. The most callous are softened into sympathetic tenderness, in contemplating their own peculiar woe, exemplified in the case of another ; and lips which never before gave utterance to sounds of affection, have been known to express a warm and real interest in a fellow-creature's affliction, when painful experience has taught them to understand how bitter that affliction is. It is thus that suffering *enforces* upon us the duty of " bearing one another's burthens."

But large and comprehensive as are its lessons, even when confined to this world, those by which it prepares us for another, are by far the most to be prized.

The full benefit of suffering is only to be justly appreciated by the expectations and desires of a glorious immortality, which it is so eminently calculated to inspire. Its full perfection is only to be realized in those brighter realms to which it paves the way. It is in this view alone that it can be steadily beheld, not only with calmness, but with a degree of in-

creasing joy, which, like “the path of the just, shines more and more unto the perfect day.”

In the most submissive mind, whilst that mind remains untouched and unrenewed by the Spirit of God, affliction can never be more than patiently sustained. That “joy in tribulation” of which the Apostle speaks, can never be comprehended, unless the soul be elevated to the noblest conceptions of what the Almighty designs in the infliction of sorrow. Such conceptions the Scriptures are alone calculated to impart. The Bible, therefore, is almost the only book which, in his distresses, the Christian can bear to look into. Other works may be valuable to him at other times, but then he requires to draw his stream of consolation from the fountain-head.

It is not so with the disbeliever in divine revelation ; and hence he has, at the best, such vague and uncertain ideas of his case, that the sum and substance of whatever degree of resignation his temperament may permit him to display, consists chiefly, if he be an enemy to reflection, in his banishing the subject entirely

from his thoughts ; and if he be a philosopher, in his efforts to sustain the dignity of his nature, by calmly yielding to what is inevitable ; and if he be a frivolous man, in his *whiling* away the precious moments of his visitation, by occupying himself with any trifles which may serve to chase away thought, and preserve him from the chance of any useful meditations.

Such views may impart an exterior composure of conduct, which the world is well inclined to admire ; but to the Christian, scarcely any sight can be more displeasing than this. Mr. Cecil, whose vigorous delineations suggest themselves to me whenever I wish to illustrate my meaning, mentions the following case :—
“ I have tried to irritate the torpid mind, but all in vain. I once visited a young clergyman of this character, who was seized with a dangerous illness at a coffee-house in town, whither some business had brought him ;—the first time I saw him we conversed very closely together, and in the prospect of death he seemed solicitous to prepare for it. But I could make no sort of impression upon him—all I

could possibly say met his entire approbation, though I saw his heart felt no interest in it. When I visited him the second time, the fear of death was gone, and with it all solicitude about religion. He was still civil and grateful, but he tried to parry off the business on which he knew I came. 'I will shew you, Sir, some little things with which I have worn away the hours of my confinement and solitude.' He brought out a quantity of pretty and tasty drawings. I was at a loss how to express, with suitable force and delicacy, the high sense I felt of his indecorum and insipidity, and to leave a deep impression on his conscience. I rose, however, instantly, said my time was expired, wished him well, and withdrew *."

To withdraw is indeed refreshing, when to remain would only subject the beholder to that pain which every pious heart must experience in witnessing the chastening hand of God, thus mocked and thus resisted. But blessed be his name! there are amongst the countless thousands of his suffering creatures, some who ex-

* Remains, p. 236.

emplify another, and a lovelier view of the purposes of affliction ; some, who from the depths of wretchedness, are yet enabled to say, “ O come hither, and I will tell you what he has done for my soul !” It is well to obey that call—you can go nowhere to a better purpose than to the house of an afflicted Christian—you can listen to no discourse so edifying as that which flows from the lips of him, who in the midst of distress can truly exclaim, “ it is the Lord ; let him do what seemeth him good !” That is the man to whom affliction, let her come in what form she will, comes always as a messenger from heaven,—and, like the Ruler of Israel, discoursing with the Saviour, he is ready to receive her with the words, “ I know thou art a teacher come from God ;” and then he turns his gaze, not where rebellious nature murmurs for her suffering, and clamours for indulgence to her grief, but where his holy monitor advises. First, then, she disperses the cloud in which pride and full-blown happiness had enveloped his sins. These she discloses to his view—she tells him to contrast them with his merits—she calls upon him to behold his worthlessness—

she lays him low, down to the dust, and prostrates him before the chastening hand of God.

O heavenly hour! sublimest moment in a sinner's life! when the obedient and contrite heart melts at the touch of sorrow, and like the soft and yielding wax, imbibes the saintly seal of God's own Spirit!

The most triumphant course of human joy has no such hour as this! This is that hour which makes the courts of heaven ring with acclamations, and the bright angels that surround the mercy-seat rejoice to witness it. Let us then meet with no averted face our best of friends, for such it must remain with us to make affliction. No; let us welcome the divine, the heavenly guest. She comes to us full fraught with blessings, though as yet we see them not.

As yet perhaps we do but recognize her as the dark disturber of our joys. It is indeed most difficult for the unhappy to extend their views beyond the painful present. Sorrow is so engrossing, so absorbing in its nature, that it seems, as it were, to fill the whole soul, and leave no place for any other sentiment. It

comes too, for the most part, to an unprepared and unwatchful mind. Security is commonly the forerunner of danger, but the experienced Christian is so well taught in the scriptural maxim, "be not high-minded, but fear," that he stands in the midst of his seemingly strongest blessings, rather as their appointed guardian than their master; as using a deposit intrusted for an uncertain period to his care, and ready to resign it at any moment, and in any manner, that may be required.

But, be his experience what it may, he differs not from the less advanced believer in the endurance of those fond regrets, which nature in her agony *will* heave, for her departed happiness. There is a description of Mr. Cecil's own case, which beautifully exemplifies a saint in his sorrows. I extract the following reflections, written in sickness, from his "Life and Remains," an inestimable book to the Christian student; rich in the best wisdom, profound in sentiment, and altogether a manual worthy of far better praise than this humble tribute, which I am still most happy in offering it.

"Sunday noon.—In great pain—disposed to

preach again, on a new text. *She answered, 'It is well.'* That is, God is *wiser* than I am. He *knoweth the way that I take, and when I am tried, I shall come forth as gold.* He knows how to bring good out of this evil. What can he take away, that he cannot make up to me? Pain, loss, solitude, what are ye? The way home! He knows the way—that is enough. He has promised to be with me in the way—that is more than enough. *'It is well,'* that is, God is *mightier* than I am. He can make this dying and painful way the way of life— the way of comfort—the way of joy, as well as holiness. He has done it ten thousand times—I have seen it done. *What child is he whom his father chasteneth not?* I would be a son, but not scourged. I am a fool whom even experience cannot make wise. I see*** and *** and *** whom he does not chastise; all professors *** but are they sons? I see*** and *** who are sinking under their troubles, and going to Satan for comfort, because they are not sons.

“ ‘*It is well,*’ that is, he is *better* than I am. He has *thoughts of peace,* while I indulge

thoughts of evil. He means better than I can give him credit for. He asks me for nothing but time and trust, in order to make the whole plain and gracious to my eye. ‘No,’ say I, ‘show it me *now*, and it sufficeth.’ ‘What,’ saith he, ‘am I *alone* not to be trusted? How many of my creatures have you trusted for what you could not see? How often have you rested on dust and ashes, as on a sure foundation?’

“Wednesday morning.—Pain left me after the above was put down, and then it was thrown aside; but returned this morning at four o’clock, and drove me from the bed to begin again, but with nothing new. ‘*It is well*’—God is more *holy* than I, and will burn up the dross. He is more *faithful*, and does not forget his promise, to purify the sons of Levi, that they may first present a pure offering, and then be offered up themselves.”
P. 32.

Suffering is, in truth, the most effectual purifier of the heart; and the only visible means by which Almighty God sanctifies the soul, and occasions it to glorify his cause. It is a pro-

cess in which, to the eye of faith, the workings of his Holy Spirit are manifested. It is the test by which, in his divine wisdom, he tried and made perfect the captain of our salvation. It seemed good to Him that, "he should be a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and that we should hide, as it were, our faces from him." "It pleased him to bruise him, and to put him to grief." It was the same with the holy apostles and fathers of the church. "These were they who came out of great tribulation."

The whole course of God's providence, illustrates and confirms the doctrine, that "whom the Lord loves, he chastens, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth." The reasons for this, like all those which distinguish the divine proceedings, though not obvious upon a cursory view, are still so perfectly intelligible to a humble and diligent inquirer, that "all who run may read." The most obtuse intellect is capable of comprehending the simple duties of penitence and patience and resignation—the peculiar duties of the afflicted. But, alas! it is not with the obtuse and uneducated that we have to contend this point. Generally speaking, there

is no class of society who more glorify their heavenly Father by humble submission to his inflictions, than the religious poor. Much of this quiescence of the will, must, doubtless, be attributed to the natural causes of habits of submission, and of endurance, and the total absence of abstract speculations, which incline them to see nothing but what is, and which prevent their sufferings from being heightened by the terrors of an indulged and excited imagination. But we should dishonour the promise of God, which proclaims him as delighting to dwell with him that is of a humble and contrite spirit, if we did not trace the principal source of their devout resignation to the simplicity of their faith, which rests upon the gracious promises of Scripture, believes them to come from God, and that therefore they must be true, and abiding for ever; and applies them to their own individual case, because the Bible abounds with passages that warrant such an application.

It would be well for many of "the wise ones of the earth," if they added to their mental stores, such a simple creed as this; but we are continually called upon to remark, how much

that is valuable “is hid from the wise and prudent, and revealed unto babes.” That any rational being should be such a babe in observation as not to discern “the precious uses of adversity,” would be indeed scarcely credible, if it were not for the melancholy testimony of numbers who are to be daily beheld, restored from the very verge of ruin and the depths of the most overwhelming sorrows, to any course but the course to which affliction points. Of these unhappy persons, what can be said? Is it not to be fearfully believed, that in their unimproved return to the sort of happiness they prize, they may be designated under that class of whom it has been said, “Let them alone, they are joined to their idols!”

The fate of those who languish on the bed of sickness, who mourn the bereavement of their fondest hopes, who watch their best and fairest treasures daily fading from their sight, is blessed, and doubly blessed, compared with that of him, who turns from the instructive school of sorrow, quits her dark chambers unsanctified, unpurified, and unsubdued; the same guilty, thoughtless, reckless sinner, rushing with eagerness

upon the same giddy, careless, abandoned world which God, in his mercy, would have snatched him from.

Be his distresses what they may, his agonies the sharpest that frail flesh and blood can bear, his pangs of soul or body bitterer than language can describe, or the most vivid force of imagination can conceive, the man who can lift one prayerful thought to God for pity and for pardon, for patience and for sanctification, that man is to be numbered amongst the chosen children of felicity. He is brought where, but for his affliction, he never might have been brought,—and where he must have been brought, if he ever hoped to be numbered amongst the blissful inhabitants of heaven. He is brought to a throne of grace ; to a redeeming Saviour ; to a pardoning God. And not merely as heretofore, perhaps, with words devoid of thought, and heartless petitions, of which he scarcely understands the meaning ; for, as Archbishop Leighton justly remarks, “ It is certain that the greater part of men, as they babble out vain, languid, and inefficacious prayers, most unworthy the ear of the blessed God, so they

seem in some degree to set a just estimate upon them, neither hoping for any success from them; nor indeed seeming to be at all solicitous about it, but committing them to the wind as vain words, which, in truth, they are."

It is not thus unwisely and unwittingly that a penitential sufferer is brought before the mercy seat of the Almighty; he is brought as a suppliant in its genuine character; a poor, unhappy, weak, and helpless sinner, tried with calamity beyond his human power to bear, and exercised with sorrows that amaze and terrify his understanding. Perhaps some philosopher may visit to console him; but repressed by strong contempt, just hints the degradation he is bringing on the dignity of nature by his childish grief, and is silent. But our afflicted man is no philosopher. He bids the scornful sage enjoy his dignity alone. "For me," he says, I am a sinner, I have no dignity, I have no moral grandeur. The book of reckoning is held up against me; my soul beholds herself a bankrupt towards her God, and acquiesces in her chastisement. I see no ground, no scope for self-complacency in any thing but penitence—the humblest, lowliest penitence."

There is, in truth, no other offering, no other testimony which can be acceptable in the sight of him “who seeth not as man seeth.” To a frail misjudging mortal indeed, there may be the semblance of something grand and dignified in a high unbending demeanour, an unshaken firmness, an unbroken spirit in the midst of misfortune. But if the Scriptures are not totally “a cunningly devised fable,” if what they tell us has any meaning, how can *such* views of sorrow accord with those purifying, humbling, chastening impressions which such passages as the following would occasion it to inspire ?

“Behold, happy is the man whom God correcteth ; therefore despise not thou the chastening of the Almighty*.”

“Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker ; let the potsherd strive with the potsherds of the earth. Shall the clay say to him that fashioneth it, what makest thou † ?

“Let all their wickedness come before thee : and do unto them as thou hast done unto me for all my transgressions, for my sighs are many, and my heart is faint ‡.”

* Job v. 17.

† Isaiah xlv. 9.

‡ Lam. i. 22.

“ Wherefore doth a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins ?

“ Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to the Lord *.”

“ Submit yourselves therefore to God †.”

“ Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God ‡.”

These rules, at the same time that they point to the only true and legitimate purpose of sorrow, viz. the subjugation of the will, and the sanctification of the heart, are far more calculated to promote *real* constancy and unshaken firmness of spirit, than any motives which are grounded upon the desire of becoming the object of *mere* human praise. The fortitude of the pious man in his affliction, is as a plant warmed by the glorious sun, and nourished by the dews of heaven, daily growing in strength and beauty ; whilst that of him whose mental energy subsists chiefly upon the applause of others, resembles an exotic, forced by artificial means into a feeble and uncertain life. Would you, then, admire the triumph of the soul when nature quails beneath

* Lam. ii. 39, 40.

† James iv. 7.

‡ 1 Pet. v. 6.

the anguish of her fleshly pangs, seek not the gloomy chamber which no beam of heavenly grace enlightens. There you may see, perhaps, the proud unyielding mind strong in itself, despising and detesting its affliction—yet causing that affliction to feed the never-dying flame of vain ambition, by making it the spring and source of efforts, which the world shall gaze at, and admire. This you may see—but nothing more—alas! you would not wish to see—your heart would bleed to see that wretched, hard, relentless spirit, in its silent, solitary, secret hours—when no vain world is near—no sycophant—no parasite—but all is still—all but the voice of conscience—all but the restless spirit faintly murmuring—“should that neglected Bible speak the words of truth!—O! should it be indeed the voice of God!”

Poor, miserable being, where is your triumph!—where your dignity!—where your support when such a thought as this arises?

Leave then, these false, unreal champions in the cause of moral strength, and seek the abode of him who bows beneath the rod,

because he recognizes who it is that has appointed it.

Yet though the storm has bent him even to the ground, it has not made him abject. He yields—but it is to a heavenly arm of strength—to him who “rides forth conquering and to conquer.” To that sublime and glorious victor, he alone pours forth the weakness of his soul—to Him who, in the midst of judgment, thinks of mercy, he lifts his suppliant voice.—To Him who marks his every groan, his every tear, he carries all his human weakness—all his human sins—for he is human—he is sinful—his case is manifest—he cannot hide it—he cannot mock himself or God, by rhapsodies of virtue and of dignity. His most sublime idea is an atoning Saviour; his most enlarged and noble thought, a pardoning God for that dear Saviour’s sake.

Thus broken-hearted, and penitent, and humbled, in his most sweet communion with his heavenly Master, his intercourse with those around him, *must* partake its character. It *must* betoken by some gracious influence—some pure and holy manifestation—that he “has been with Jesus.”

It does indeed! It tells that he has been with Him, who called the weary and the heavy laden to his tender arms; and from his Saviour's fulness has received the bread of life, and drank of those translucent streams, which, those who taste, shall never thirst again.

It marks him by innumerable tokens, as a holy, sanctified, and altered man. Patient in tribulation—continuing instant in prayer—enduring hardness—mortifying the flesh—crucifying his corruptions—and ever looking unto Jesus as the “author and finisher of his faith”—are signs of a regenerated nature too obvious to be mistaken.

But the sublime and crowning test, that suffering has accomplished its intended work, is in the meek and calm though solemn resignation with which it suggests the hour of death. As a means to an end—it is the most complete—the most beautiful that imagination can form; means which bespeak it at once to come from the hand of a good Providence, who draws his children from the vainest of their vanities, an undue attachment to this fading life, by measures which do not *compel* so much as *incline* them to seek the path

which conducts to one of never-ending joy—thus sweetly exemplifying his own most gracious promise—“ I will draw them with the cords of love.”

Thus drawn by heavenly tenderness, the awakened soul finds often its chief cause for gratitude in its most heavy chastisements. It goes from “ strength to strength ” with increasing light at every step. It experimentally knows, that, before the power of the Lord, every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain laid low. The mountains of difficulty, at which the sufferer felt dismayed, are levelled at the feet of faith; at her command they are removed, and cast into the depths of the sea; and when successively destroyed, but one appalling object yet remains—one gloomy pass—one fearful solitude—the valley of the shadow of death—his heart perhaps a moment may recoil and shrink—and shudder at the sight—but he renews his confidence with many a fond remembrance of the past. “ O with what confidence,” says Flavel, in his invaluable work upon “ the mystery of Providence,” “ may a Christian throw himself into the arms

of that God, with whom he has so long conversed and walked in this world; whose visits have been sweet and frequent, with whom the soul has contracted so intimate acquaintance; to whom he has committed all his affairs, and still found him a faithful God, and now has no reason to doubt but that he shall find him so in his last distress and exigence also!" Thus indeed, does the Christian comfort himself. He thinks how faithful every promise has been found—how truly every supplication answered. Then boldly does he gird himself, and make ready for his pilgrimage through the dark land before him—boldly he does it—not because *he* is *strong*, but because he is weak—so weak that he incessantly requires to dwell upon the sweet assurance "*my* grace is sufficient for thee!"

It is sufficient. His own righteousness—his own wisdom—his own strength—his own resources—he absolutely discards. Renouncing every other stay, and casting himself simply—singly—entirely on his Saviour—"he goes through the wilderness leaning on his beloved"—fainting perhaps, but never fearing

—trembling, but not terrified. “The Lord is my shepherd—I shall not want”—is the precious promise that sustains his confidence. Contentedly he follows where his heavenly guardian leads the way; assured that he will make him at last “to lie down in green pastures, and will lead him beside the still waters of everlasting life.”

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